





Joan Taylor.

1933.

THE RAMBLINGS
OF A BIRD LOVER

WORKS BY CANON RAVEN

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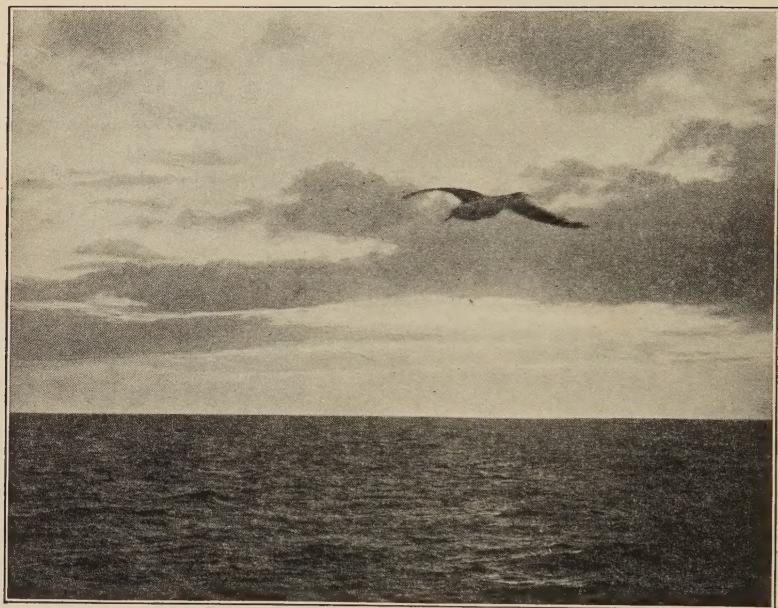
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GOING WEST
Herring Gull at Sea

THE RAMBLINGS OF A BIRD LOVER

by

CHARLES E. RAVEN, D.D.

Canon of Liverpool and Chaplain to the King

ILLUSTRATED WITH SIXTY-SEVEN PHOTOGRAPHS
BY THE AUTHOR

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TO MY FRIEND
AD. BURDET

PREFACE

It is an honest custom which allows an author a preliminary page on which to apologise for himself, to express gratitude to his friends, and to explain, if he can, the purpose of his book.

Apology I have none, but, this being my fifth offence in three years, would throw myself on the mercy of the reader, and put on record my admiration for the long-suffering of my publishers. I was born bird-mad, and my madness will out.

Others must, however, carry the responsibility with me. The kindness that I have received from very many who share my love of nature has given me the opportunities which this book records. To M. and Mme. Burdet, to Colonel and Mrs. Madoc, to Mr. and Mrs. Coward, to Mr. and Mrs. Sherwood, to Mr. and Miss Spence and Miss Crozier, to Mr. and Mrs. Travers, to Miss Mary Rathbone, and above all to Mrs. Andrew MacIver and "Joel," this book owes its existence. And there are very many more who in one way or another have helped me to see and depict new birds and new places.

The book has been written at odd moments and for the joy of it, and with no ulterior motive except the hope that something of that joy may be passed on. Interest in birds is spreading rapidly. Everywhere among younger people one meets those who know much and desire to know more. For such folks it may be an encouragement to see how a comrade spends his holidays, to realise that all around us are haunts of bird-life, and to form plans for using spare

time in a pursuit which is open to all and which, more than any that I know, brings lasting refreshment and ever-new delights. In these days of cheap and rapid transport wild life is within reach of us all. Movements like the Girl Guides, schools with any claim to wisdom, are encouraging us to study it. Those of us who cannot be artists, poets, musicians can find in it that which haunts even the least gifted, the beauty of God.

It is in the æsthetic, spiritual and recreative worth of his hobby that the bird-lover will find his chief reward. This does not mean that the study of birds is not intellectually important. The work initiated by Espinas and recently summarised by Dr. Alverdes, the work which has contributed so largely to the thought of Dr. Lloyd Morgan, the work of careful observation of habits and psychology is of the highest significance alike to the philosopher and to the man of affairs. I have tried to show elsewhere, in my book *The Creator Spirit*, that if we are to learn how to live in the fellowship of a rightly organised society, the study of comparative psychology cannot safely be neglected. It is not enough to murmur the word instinct, and dismiss the animal kingdom as actuated by motives wholly different from our own. Nor is it scientific to assume that the analogy of human mentality and behaviour can be used to explain the ways of birds and beasts. Only by sympathetic but critical observation of their individual and social life can we collect material for the great task that awaits the thinkers of the future. And to that task each of us here and now can hope to make a contribution.

Of the value of an amateur's casual observations a striking instance has just come to me. A week ago, on August 31st, I was cruising with my friend Mr. Robert Travers off the coast of County Cork. The sea was still heaving with

the swell of a recent gale and was broken into wavelets by a pleasant breeze. Birds were in plenty. Black Guillemots, the young very white on head and neck, Puffins, mostly juveniles in small parties or alone, Razorbills, Guillemots, Shags, Cormorants, Gannets and Manx Shearwaters were all on view. Suddenly on the open sea, about a mile or more out from Toe Head, we spied a couple of small birds. They were swimming lightly and high, and as to the manner born. We circled round them, not ten yards distant, and I fixed their identity by a photograph. At last they sprang up and flew easily away. Those birds were a couple of young Knots, newly arrived from the Arctic. I knew that unfledged Sandpipers could swim like ducks, and had seen a wounded Oystercatcher take to the water. But that migrant Waders would alight on the sea, unfatigued, and swim for pleasure was entirely new to me. And it throws a measure of light on their great oceanic travels. To those who have open eyes and care to notice birds, such opportunities of knowledge may at any moment be given.

A word may be said about the illustrations. All of them are from my own photographs taken during the past three seasons. I still use the simplest sort of apparatus, and am still grossly ignorant of photographic processes. The pictures have been chosen rather to represent a wide range of different species than from their artistic or technical merit. For the production of the prints I am greatly indebted to my friend Mr. Sherwood, and for the selection and arrangement to my wife. For the faults in them and in the book the responsibility is entirely my own.

C. E. R.

Liverpool, Sept. 1927.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE OPENING OF THE SEASON	I
II.	THE PUFFINS AND THEIR ISLAND	19
III.	THE HARVEST OF THE SEA	40
IV.	BIRDING AT BANGOR	64
V.	LIVERPOOL'S PARADISE	72
VI.	IN EAST LOTHIAN	88
VII.	A DAY ON THE SHINGLE	103
VIII.	NORTHWARD BOUND	113
IX.	ON THE LANCASHIRE COAST	134
X.	AN INFANT ASSASSIN	152
XI.	THE KINDERGARTEN	166

CLASSIFIED LIST OF SPECIES PHOTOGRAPHED

- Raven, *Corvus corax*. Bird (Pl. I). Bird and nest (Pl. II).
 Golden Oriole, *Oriolus oriolus*. Birds and nest (Pl. XXIII).
 Meadow Pipit, *Anthus pratensis*. Bird and nest (Pl. XIII).
 Nuthatch, *Sitta europæa*. Bird and nest (Pl. XXI).
 Goldcrest, *Regulus regulus*. Bird (Pl. XIII).
 Stonechat, *Saxicola rubicola*. Bird and nest (Pl. XXIV).
 Green Woodpecker, *Picus viridis*. Bird and nest (Pl. XXI).
 Cuckoo, *Cuculus canorus*. Young in nest (Pl. XXII).
 Long-eared Owl, *Asio otus*. Bird and young (Pl. XXVIII).
 Little Owl, *Carine noctua*. Young (Pl. XXVI).
 Montagu's Harrier, *Circus pygargus*. Male bird (Pl. XXX). Female and nest (Pl. XXIX). Young (Pl. XXVI).
 Buzzard, *Buteo buteo*. Bird and nest (Pl. II). Young (Pl. III).
 Golden Eagle, *Aquila chrysaetus*. Nest (Pl. XVII).
 Peregrine Falcon, *Falco peregrinus*. Young (Pl. X).
 Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*. Bird and nest (Pl. XXX). Young (Pl. XXVI).
 Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*. Young (Pl. XXIII).
 Shag, *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*. Birds (Pl. VII). Young (Pl. XVIII).
 Shoveller, *Spatula clypeata*. Bird and nest (Pl. XXVII).
 White Stork, *Ciconia ciconia*. Birds and nest (Pl. XXIV).
 Spoonbill, *Platalea leucorodia*. Young (Pl. XXVI).
 Stone Curlew, *Ædicnemus ædicnemus*. Bird and nest (Pl. XIV).
 Common Snipe, *Gallinago gallinago*. Young (Pl. XV).
 Ruff, *Machetes pugnax*. Young (Pl. XV).
 Common Sandpiper, *Tringa hypoleucos*. Young (Pl. XVI).
 Curlew, *Numenius arquata*. Bird and nest (Pl. VIII). Young (Pl. XV).
 Avocet, *Recurvirostra avosetta*. Young (Pl. XV).
 Golden Plover, *Charadrius apricarius*. Young (Pl. XII).

- Ringed Plover, *Ægialitis hiaticula*. Bird and nest (Pl. XIX). Young (Pl. XII).
- Kentish Plover, *Ægialitis alexandrina*. Bird and nest (Pl. XXVII).
- Oystercatcher, *Hæmatopus ostralegus*. Young (Pl. XVIII).
- Common Gull, *Larus canus*. Bird and nest (Pl. XVI). Young (Pl. IX).
- Herring Gull, *Larus argentatus*. Birds (Pl. X). Young (Pl. IX).
- Great Black-backed Gull, *Larus marinus*. Birds (Pl. VI). Young (Pl. IX).
- Lesser Black-backed Gull, *Larus fuscus*. Birds and nest (Pl. VI). Young (Pl. IX).
- Kittiwake, *Rissa tridactyla*. Bird and nest (Pl. V).
- Common Tern, *Sterna hirundo*. Birds and nest (Pl. XIX).
- Arctic Tern, *Sterna macrura*. Birds and nest (Pl. XX).
- Little Tern, *Sterna minuta*. Young (Pl. XII).
- Black Tern, *Hydrochelidon nigra*. Birds and nest (Pl. XXV). Bird and young (Pl. XXV). Young (Pl. XVIII).
- Razorbill, *Alca torda*. Bird (Pl. VII). Young (Pl. IV).
- Guillemot, *Uria troille*. Birds and nests (Pl. V). Bird (Pl. VII). Young (Pl. IV).
- Black Guillemot, *Uria grylle*. Young (Pl. IV).
- Puffin, *Fratercula arctica*. Birds (Pl. III). Young (Pl. IV).
- Fulmar Petrel, *Fulmarus glacialis*. Bird (Pl. XI).
- Black-throated Diver, *Colymbus arcticus*. Nest (Pl. XVII).
- Red-throated Diver, *Colymbus stellatus*. Young (Pl. XVIII).
- Black-necked Grebe, *Podiceps nigricollis*. Nest (Pl. VIII).
- Red Grouse, *Lagopus scoticus*. Young (Pl. XII).

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PACING PAGE
Going West. Herring Gull at Sea. <i>Glandore</i> , 1927	
	<i>Frontispiece.</i>
I. Raven at Home. <i>Westmorland</i> , 1927	8
II. Raven in Nest. <i>Westmorland</i> , 1927	9
Buzzard and Nest. <i>Westmorland</i> , 1927	9
III. Buzzard : seven days old. <i>Westmorland</i> , 1926	18
Puffins. <i>Puffin Island</i> , 1926	18
IV. Guillemot : five days old. Razorbill : seven days old	19
Puffin : three days old. Black Guillemot : newly hatched (four babies)	19
V. Kittiwake and Young. <i>Puffin Island</i> , 1926	38
Guillemots. <i>Puffin Island</i> , 1926	38
VI. Lesser Black-backed Gull and Nest. <i>Puffin Island</i> , 1926	39
Great Black-backed Gull. <i>Glandore</i> , 1926	39
VII. Shags. <i>Glandore</i> , 1926	64
Razorbills and Guillemot. <i>Glandore</i> , 1927	64
VIII. Curlew on Nest. <i>Bloemendaal</i> , 1925	65
Black-necked Grebe's Nest. <i>N. Wales</i> , 1927	65
IX. Great Black-backed Gull : one day old. <i>Scourie</i> , 1927. Common Gull. <i>Scourie</i> , 1927. Lesser Black-backed Gull. <i>Puffin Island</i> , 1926. Herring Gull. <i>Texel</i> , 1926 (four babies)	74
X. Herring Gulls. <i>Llandudno</i> , 1926	75
Young Peregrines : about a fortnight old. <i>Isle of Man</i> , 1927	75
XI. Fulmar Petrel. <i>Handa</i> , 1927	90
Gannet. <i>Glandore</i> , 1927	90
XII. Golden Plover. <i>Lammermuir</i> , 1927. Red Grouse. <i>Lammermuir</i> , 1927. Ringed Plover. <i>Scourie</i> , 1927. Little Tern. <i>Suffolk</i> , 1927 (four babies)	91

	FACING PAGE
XIII. Meadow Pipit and Nest. <i>Bloemendaal</i> , 1925 . . .	108
Goldcrest. <i>Surrey</i> , 1927	108
XIV. Stone Curlew at Nest. <i>Bloemendaal</i> , 1926 . . .	109
XV. Common Snipe. <i>Lammermuir</i> , 1927. Ruffs. <i>Texel</i> , 1926. Avocet. <i>Texel</i> , 1926. Curlew. <i>Bloemendaal</i> , 1925 (four babies)	114
XVI. Common Gull on Nest. <i>Texel</i> , 1926	115
Young Common Sandpiper. <i>Westmorland</i> , 1927 . . .	115
XVII. Black-throated Diver's Nest. <i>Sutherland</i> , 1927 . . .	130
Golden Eagle's Nest. <i>Sutherland</i> , 1927	130
XVIII. Shag. <i>Handa</i> , 1927. Red-throated Diver. <i>Scourie</i> , 1927. Black Tern. <i>Texel</i> , 1926. Oystercatcher. <i>Texel</i> , 1926 (four babies)	131
XIX. Common Terns : chick just hatched. <i>Texel</i> , 1926 . . .	140
Ringed Plover and Nest. <i>Lancashire</i> , 1925	140
XX. Arctic Terns : cock sitting. <i>Lancashire</i> , 1925 . . .	141
XXI. Green Woodpecker at Nest. <i>Overveen</i> , 1925	152
Nuthatch at Nest. <i>Overveen</i> , 1925	152
XXII. Young Cuckoo ejecting Redstarts. <i>Bloemendaal</i> , 1926 . . .	153
XXIII. Young Cormorants in Nest. <i>Lekkerkerke</i> , 1926 . . .	166
Golden Orioles at Nest. <i>Bloemendaal</i> , 1926	166
XXIV. Stonechat at Nest. <i>Texel</i> , 1926	167
Storks at Nest : the male clapping. <i>Leyden</i> , 1926 . . .	167
XXV. Black Terns : cock bringing food to mate. <i>Texel</i> , 1926 . . .	170
Black Tern and Young : chick one day old. <i>Texel</i> , 1926 . . .	170
XXVI. Spoonbill. <i>Naardermeer</i> , 1925. Montagu's Harrier. <i>Texel</i> , 1926. Little Owls. <i>Bloemendaal</i> , 1925. Kestrels. <i>Texel</i> , 1926 (four babies)	171
XXVII. Shoveller and Nest. <i>Texel</i> , 1926	174
Kentish Plover and Nest. <i>Texel</i> , 1926	174
XXVIII. Long-eared Owl and Young. Seventeen days old and younger. <i>Texel</i> , 1926	175
XXIX. Montagu's Harrier. Hen alighting at Nest. <i>Texel</i> , 1926 . . .	180
XXX. Montagu's Harrier. Male at Nest. <i>Texel</i> , 1926 . . .	181
Kestrel at Nest. <i>Texel</i> , 1926	181

THE RAMBLINGS OF A BIRD LOVER

CHAPTER I

THE OPENING OF THE SEASON

IT has often been remarked that the Bible begins with a garden and ends with a city, and those of us who still cling to the legend of Paradise Lost will do well to remember that the life of citizenship is a true stage in man's evolution. But with most of us Nature dies hard. There may be some who can sit happily at their desks when snow, so glorious in the Engadine, makes the town doubly detestable; some even who are content with bricks and mortar when the winter aconites break through the soil. They must be few; and I do not envy them, though they escape the sweet sorrow that February brings to those of us who cannot forget the days when we lived in the country.

A little pile of boxes hidden in a secret drawer contains the evidences of my spring madness. Yearly as soon as January is out the fever takes me, and I rush out to anticipate the summer and waste plates upon the Dabchicks in Prince's Park or the Scoters trying to cleanse themselves of oil in the pools of Ainsdale. The results are invariably valueless; one cannot take snapshots in the twilight of the year and the murk of Mersey-side; but the impulse has a pathos of its own which my fellow-prisoners of the cities will share and understand. So precious they are, those days when we pretend that it is spring: precious too because here at

2 THE RAMBLINGS OF A BIRD LOVER

least our hopes will in due time be rewarded. Spring comes, in spite of our annual grumbling at its delay.

Every lover of birds must feel this peculiar zest at the opening of a new year. At no time (no, not in the height of June) is his passion so pure and so intense. The Thrush that sings outside my window as soon as Christmas is past; the Tawny Owl that once on a never-forgotten winter's night interrupted my work with his hunting cry, and made me fling my book aside and rush to the door to see him silhouetted against the stars in the tree that adorns my "front garden"; the Moorhens on the lake in the park; even the Blackheads whom in summer I deride: no one but a townsman in the first months of the year could love them so fervently. And when the days come when it is possible that nesting may have begun, how eagerly we seize every opportunity, and how generously bless the birds that dare to build early!

It is partly this desire to begin the quest, partly a sentimental attachment to my totem-bird, that has made me dedicate the last two springs to the Raven. And it is among the many advantages of Liverpool that his haunts are not hopelessly remote. Until 1926 my acquaintance with him had been small. A glimpse when I was a lad near Llangollen; another on a memorable day at Ireland's Eye; a wonderful view when we toiled through the mist to the top of the Carnedds and saw him sitting a few yards below on a pinnacle of the western face; and that was all. Then early in February a meeting at Aberystwyth and the kindness of my host, Canon Williams, gave me the chance of spending an hour at a breeding-site on the cliffs. We saw the old nest, and as we left both birds came sailing over us. And I vowed that this year I would extend my knowledge of him.

In March the chance came. An engagement to preach at Giggleswick coincided with a few days of freedom and an invitation to spend them in the Lakes, and on the 15th we set off to a spot which, thanks to predatory egg-thieves (they can get £5 for a clutch of English Ravens), had better not be defined. During the next two months the little house saw much of us; for on our second visit after Easter Peg succumbed to the measles there, the other children followed her at discreet intervals, and their stay lengthened from one week to six.

It was a long trek before I saw my first English Raven. We drove some distance to an unfrequented valley, made a few inquiries of a kindly and bird-loving parson, stowed the car in the home-meadow of a hillside farm, and took to a pass between heather-clad slopes, leading on to lonely mountains. Grouse were kekking round us, in all their courtship finery; every tussock seemed to have its red-wattled sentinel. But it was not till we had passed up beyond their range out on to the grass and rock that our bird came to view. Then from behind the summit the barking cry which once heard is known for always; and as we crouched he came over, flying straight and strongly, and obliging us with a fine performance of his nuptial roll before he had crossed the valley. Twice more we saw him, first on his return flight, and then when, after a careful stalk, I looked over the summit to find him perched twenty yards away on a turret of rock. We were not far from a favourite nesting site, but the further side of the mountain abounded in miniature precipices, and we could not locate the precise position of his home. No doubt somewhere his mate was sitting. Indeed as we left we got a glimpse of what I believe was the pair high up over the crags. My passion to see a real Raven's nest in use had to go unsatisfied.

But not for long! Next day a friend, the agent for a lake-land estate, had offered to show me over some part of his charge. A steep and winding track led us up at last to one of the long straight valleys driven into the heart of the country—those valleys which to the townsman seem endless, growing gradually narrower until at last the barrier slopes close in and a wall of mountain blocks the way. Once years ago I set out along one—Coledale, I believe it was—with my sister; we toiled up it from Braithwaite past the slopes of the bold peak of Grisedale with the green hummock of Grassmoor miles ahead. It was a day of brilliant sunshine and airless heat, and save for a couple of quarrymen early in our course the solitude seemed complete. Looking back, memory sees two small and lonely figures on a track long and narrow and seemingly interminable, a picture intensified by the dramatic contrast at its end. For when at last, weary but triumphant, we clambered up the screen of rock at the valley's head, there in the amphitheatre of the hills with all our route laid out before it was a huge beanfeast in full session; a gathering that tore itself away from its buns and biscuits to greet us with a hymn on our arrival in its midst. This valley of the Ravens was not Coledale: let that at least be made plain; but it was long and desolate, with a trickle of water in its depth and a fringe of crags on its flank. It was here that we hoped for our birds.

At first a pair of Magpies and then a single Kestrel were all that we saw. But when for the third time I had asked "how much further," my guide pointed to a big boulder ahead of us as marking the position of the usual nesting-place. Before we reached it his trained ears caught the note of the Raven, and a moment later the shrill screams of a pair of Kestrels drew my gaze to the cliffs. There in a fern-

clad chimney the little hawks had their home ; at its foot we found the cock's perching-place, a grassy knoll littered with pellets, several of them jewelled with shards of bright green beetles. As I looked the Raven was flying past the place, and the Kestrels stooped furiously at him. Whether they meant to strike or no was not very evident : at least the intruder used his " roll " to good purpose, turning half over and falling a foot in the air to avoid them. They certainly hustled him along, the cock pursuing him for some distance until he pitched on the summit overhanging his own part of the cliff. " They'll be nesting there again," whispered my companion : " we'll stop a bit and try to pick them out."

The actual face of the rock was some distance away : between us and it lay a slope of boulders and scree : even with glasses I could not discover anything that looked like a nest. And the birds gave no further sign. So we set out to scramble to the cliff-foot, a hot but easy climb that brought us safely to a wide shelf beneath steep crags. In those to our left was a big fissure or gully, protected on each side by piers of rock. This had been shown to me as the site of the nest. Very quietly we worked along the face, reached the corner, peered round it into the cleft. And as we did so, from a great pile of sticks not fifteen yards away the hen bird launched herself out and above us.

It was a wonderfully chosen situation. Sheltered on each side from below by jutting buttresses, the fissure was backed with a wall of sheer precipice, and at its foot was a chasm or fault. In the arch over this, inaccessible from below or from either side, set within a crevice, cleft within cleft, was the nest. It was a huge structure, very different from the flattened mass of rootlets and stalks of weed that I had seen in Wales ; its foundations of old and weather-

6 THE RAMBLINGS OF A BIRD LOVER

bleached stems testifying to its age, its upper courses of fresh and twisted wood torn from the stunted oaks and rowans of the hills, the whole a *chevaux de frise* of projecting points hiding from our view the sacred cavity within. I took some pictures at once of the nest as seen from below, and then tried to find a nearer point of vantage. The gully itself was hopeless, too wide to climb and steep as the side of a house. A long detour over the crest, a crowbar and a rope, might have made a descent possible. Without it even my rock-climbing friends who spend and lose their lives on the Lliwedds or the Coolins would have tried in vain; and their pleasures are not mine. The sides were the only possibility. That around which we had come was impossible: it rose as sheer as the gully itself. Opposite promised better: the buttress was, so to speak, terraced: just below the nest was a level ledge, and above this a sharp gable-end of rock abutting on the gully's wall some twenty feet from it. Mount the gable, stand on its ridge, and the eggs might just be visible.

The terrace yielded a pleasant picture—too low to show the interior, but close enough to tempt me, some day, to set a hide there. The gable I didn't like: it was horrid to climb, and more horrid to stand upon. But I got there, sat astride it to take a photograph, and then very fearfully raised myself. Alas! it was useless. The crevice ran back too far: its lip sheltered much of the nest. Yet I could see that behind the sturdy timbers of the outworks was a tidy hollow formed of smaller twigs and lined with a warm bedding of wool and rabbits' fur, in which, no doubt, the eggs or nestlings were concealed; but to get a view of the whole from above was, I believe, impossible. The birds had chosen well. Their treasures were safe not only from reach but from sight.

Once or twice more in the few days of my stay I saw the hen at close quarters, and a visit to the valley was usually accompanied by the cock's warning voice. But at Easter on our return the birds seemed to have moved elsewhere: possibly the young had left the nest; possibly a spell of cold and wet late in March had been disastrous to them. We saw Ravens often enough, but not in the immediate neighbourhood of their gully.

That same day on our way back we visited the last year's eyrie of a Buzzard, in a wonderful situation at the point of a spur of hills, with a vast stretch of country laid out below it. The nest had been built on a projecting plate of rock and tree-roots jutting out corbel-wise from a tumble of great boulders, and ridiculously easy of access. There were not then any signs of the birds, but next day from far below we watched a single Buzzard circling over his domain, looking with his square tail and square-tipped, full-spread wings more like an aeroplane than a bird. And as we watched from far away came two more beating leisurely towards us. As they drew overhead our bird rose in spirals to meet them. There was an interchange of compliments; the screaming cry carries far; and the new-comers sheered off and left him in possession. I wondered if he was guarding his territory against intrusion. At least it was grand to see the three in the air at once.

It was not till a month later, on April 16th, that we had a chance of closer acquaintance with the big hawks. The family had all come up, and the two elder girls having to keep a Nature Diary as a holiday-task were stimulated to an unusual enthusiasm. Betty had already paid a visit to the Ravens; so Mary decided to try the Buzzards. We went up to the old site, seeing one of the birds on the way, and I took a picture or two of it: but there was no evidence of

recent use. On the way down, and not more than a hundred yards below, was another outcrop of rock, a miniature precipice, some twenty feet deep, on the edge of a boulder-strewn ravine. Below the little cliff I caught sight of a piece of eggshell, picked it up, and recognised its rough, faintly blue surface. Buzzards were here, and at least attempting to breed. It was worth while to search.

The first place was obvious. Above my head, as I stood with the shell in my hand, and about twelve feet up, a scrubby holly was rooted into a fissure, and from the hollow between it and the rock a blackthorn grew. The cavity formed by their stems was full of dead bracken-stalks—surely an eligible site. Ten yards away the cliff broke up into terraces: to scramble up was easy, and though the ledge above the cliff was none too wide, there was room to look down through the spiky leaves. Mary's diary shall tell what we saw. "The nest is about eighteen inches across and six inches deep; and in the middle is a cup about one and a half inches deep and seven inches across. In this lie the two eggs—one very pale greenish-blue almost unspotted, and the other creamy white with pale reddish-brown smears. The outside of the nest is made of small birch twigs and bracken: the inside is almost all little shoots of green yew. In the cavity is a small piece of sheep's wool." For me, who had never seen a Buzzard's nest before, and had certainly not expected to see one now, that first peep down between the holly boughs was among the great moments of life.

It was one thing to see it, and another to take its picture. The tree grew dense and stunted, its stems too stiff to pull aside. Nothing but drastic pruning would clear a passage, and that I dare not for the birds' sake dream of attempting. Fortunately beyond the holly there was a narrow shelf of



RAVEN AT HOME



RAVEN IN NEST



BUZZARD AND NEST

rock, and on that side the nest was screened by sloe. Tying back the branches, sitting over the edge, and holding out the camera at arm's length, one could focus it roughly on the eggs, point it at a guess in their direction, and risk an exposure. But the circumstances were not ideal. The result would have been less bad if a leaky plate-holder had not sent a black line across the negative.

Next day began an heroic adventure. We had prospected the little cliff carefully, and decided that short of lowering oneself on to the actual nest there was no foothold by which it could be reached. A ladder not less than ten feet long would settle the difficulty. From a cottage three miles away we borrowed what we wanted; and in the morning my hostess and I prepared to carry it to the site. It was a long pull: a stiff bit of track at first; then a steady stretch of fell; then an awkward scramble over bog and debris. We got up with two easies in just under an hour. And then found that our labour was in vain. We could set the ladder against the nest; but you can't photograph at a foot away. We could put it against the rock, but the eggs lay screened by thick boughs and the opening through which the mother reached them faced outwards and beyond my reach. To get a picture one must be six feet from the cliff and twelve feet above the ground. We must rest content with the view from the shelf.

That afternoon I returned to Liverpool. Peg had a rash: the others were in quarantine: poor Mrs. MacIver had invalids on her hands for a month. The history of the nest was therefore to be continued. It contains one or two points of interest.

On April 24th, Mary and Mrs. MacIver visited the nest, approaching it from behind, and had a grand view of the hen bird leaving it when they appeared twenty yards away.

Buzzards must sit very close and pay little heed to what they cannot see. For with these birds the cock would utter his mewling cry as soon as we appeared on the hillside, but his wife would pay no heed unless we walked straight up to the ravine. Once later on I crawled on to the cliff top and looked down through the holly on to the hen's back. She sat with her tail in the entrance, and, seeing me, swung round and flung herself in one action from her home, a glorious golden bronze where the sunlight took her wings. But for Mary the bird was less exciting than the fact that a third egg had been laid. This I photographed a few days later, and found the nest newly lined with dry tufts of mountain grass.

By the middle of May we began to be excited about the hatching. My books did not give any very exact incubation period: possibly the weather may influence it. At any rate in this case a baby, the only one to appear, was born on May 21st, four weeks all but a day from the date when the last egg was found. The two original eggs were then still in the nest. My theory is that they and the egg whose broken remains had betrayed the site to me had been laid during the cold spell in early April; that through the cold the hen had delayed the laying of her last, and had probably been irregular in her brooding. But I could not discover whether these first eggs had been infertile or contained dead embryos. For when I visited the nest on May 28th both had disappeared. There was no trace of them on the ground below. Had the bird removed or eaten them? Or had a collector visited the nest at Whitsuntide, spared the chick, but added them to his cabinet? On May 29th the ladder was again transported, and having failed to get a picture of the baby in his home, we lifted him gently down, set him in a ready-made studio and took a "close-up." He

was a bonny infant, large and bare of paunch, pale fawn on head and neck, white on forehead, throat and breast, his eye mild and large and dark, his feet " pudgy " and cream-coloured, his beak alone giving promise of the bird of prey. No wonder he was fat. At his birth his nest was stored with three young rats : when I saw him, half a rabbit lay by his side. When last we heard of him, a long month later, he was hopping awkwardly about the rocks preparing for his first flight.

One final note may be added. Constantly when we visited the nest two birds were in the air, though the hen was sitting. And several times we saw all three together. The two were by their size both males. One of them was evidently the father of the baby ; for his usual haunt was in a big ash not far from the nest. Possibly the third was the young bird of the previous year : possibly he was an unmated cock who had attached himself, as such sometimes do, to the household.

It was not until the following season that my acquaintance with the Raven and Buzzard developed sufficiently to permit of photography ; and even then it was only a combination of perseverance and luck that secured results. The spring was for me unusually busy : nothing more than an occasional day off at intervals of a fortnight was practicable ; and Lake-land weather is at best unreliable. However, by seizing every opportunity we could at least do our part to deserve success.

Our journeyings began on March 12th with a dash to and from Westmorland in the car, and a visit to last year's nesting sites. The Ravens were in occupation ; the nest had been renovated, and the hen was sitting hard ; but even from the gable-end no effort could discover whether she had eggs or young. A fortnight later, by catching the

midnight train from London, I got another Saturday in the hills. Snow had fallen; the scree was horribly wet, slippery and perilous; and the nest was obviously empty. Probably it had been plundered: possibly the young birds had already left: at least the expedition was fruitless. Beyond a sight of two Ravens in the valley the day was wasted. And there was no sign that the Buzzards intended to occupy their previous quarters. It was a sad disappointment; for I had counted on exploiting my experience, on taking advantage of my knowledge of the ground to prepare hides and spend every available hour in an attempt to get on terms with the two species. Now we had to begin at the beginning and discover new nests.

Fortunately this was easy. After Easter my family went up to the house in which they had succumbed to the measles a year ago. Betty was again engaged upon a Nature Diary, and bird news had to be collected. I could not join them except for two isolated days. But when I heard that Mrs. MacIver had located a sitting Raven, my hopes rose. On April 21st another night journey from the south gave me a clear twenty-four hours to investigate; and by ten o'clock we were on the scene of operations.

The nest was in a precipice, a fifty-foot crag below the summit of a steep but not inaccessible hill. By making a big detour behind it, we could come out at the top of the cliff, deposit our baggage and prepare the camera, and then by a piece of zigzag climbing reach a steep slope on a level with the site, and out of the birds' range of vision. Crawling across to the edge of the sheer rock one could look straight on to the nest, where it was set at the root of a straggling tree in a crevice sheltered by an overhang from above and surmounting a piece of vertical and crumbling cliff. On that first visit I was uncertain of its exact position; and

though the camera was set at thirty feet ready for a snapshot, and the hen was sitting when I looked over the edge, the confusion and excitement were too much for me. I exposed a plate as she left, but the camera was not steady, and the result was useless.

The snapping of a bird under such circumstances is indeed a tricky business. One has a fraction of a second in which to act ; for a Raven is vigilant and moves quickly. It is useless to try to focus ; the distance must be gauged beforehand, and everything except the actual release of the shutter be made ready. Then with a flying bird there is the sportsman's inevitable tendency to treat the camera as if it were a gun and to swing in the direction of her flight. And in this particular case the stance was on a very slippery bit of slope, where an involuntary glissade was, as I once discovered, only too easy. Moreover, the climb down to it, if not quite of the teeth and toe-nail variety, was enough to strain my rather feeble nerves almost to the breaking-point. It was not surprising that the first attempt was a failure.

Three days later, after a visit to Bristol and Birmingham, we tried again. And this time an accident gave us an unusual piece of good fortune. Missing our way on the summit we descended too far to the left, and had just discovered our mistake when, from a tumble of rocks breaking out of the hill-side, a Buzzard launched herself into the air. Her nest was admirably concealed, indeed almost invisible from either side ; and it was only by an awkward climb that we were able to look down upon the eggs and achieve a precarious picture. But if we could not easily see her when sitting, she would be in the same position, and on a future occasion we might be able to approach near enough to catch a portrait of her as she departed. At any

rate it was pleasant to have the two great birds nesting within two hundred yards. That they were not too friendly neighbours was quickly evident; for as the Buzzard sailed away the cock Raven set out in pursuit, harrying her along the hillside and making ineffective efforts to get the upper station, and strike at her back.

Again we found the Raven sitting, and again I exposed a plate. This time a recognisable picture resulted. She was about a yard from her nest, her great wings at the finish of their first stroke. But although the exposure had been a $1/250$ th there were signs of movement: the camera was not perfectly still, and enlargement revealed a picture which just failed to be adequate.

It was only on the 30th April that experience triumphed. That morning was a day of cloudless sky, and only Betty's keenness made me face the heat and toil of the ascent. I had indeed had six weeks of almost ceaseless conferences, lectures and sermons, travelling almost daily and carrying a big burden of responsibility. The garden by the beck and a Tree Creeper's nest in a wee wood beyond it were singularly inviting; and the heat pleaded for laziness, fortunately to ears for which the croak of my namesakes on the hill had a still stronger attraction. If Betty could face the ascent, her Daddy would pull his old bones up it somehow. But he groaned and sweated on the way. And it was only my hostess's enthusiasm and a desire not to disappoint her in reaping the fruits of what had been her discovery that got me to the heights.

Once there all was a matter of routine. To dump the baggage beneath a yew; to scramble down to the little birch; to wriggle over the fierce descent beneath it; to take breath and draw the dark-slide, and get a firm hold of camera and shutter-release; and then to crawl crab-wise

across the glaxis to the lip of the precipice: this was by now a familiar business. And this time nerves were steady. I got to a secure knee-hold, raised head and camera, and as the sitting bird rose to her feet exposed the plate. If this was a failure, then I had failed for good. At least it was the best possible.

And so to the Buzzard. We had surveyed the track and could work easily along the hill-side to a point where the bird might detect us. There preparations were made, and I stole forward alone. Approached from the side the nest was hidden from view: only the tuft of grass which prevented it from sliding from its ledge marked the site. Slowly, and planting my feet with care, I stalked nearer. Now I was abreast the little holly thirty feet from the nest: now the structure was opening up. I began to believe that Mrs. Buzzard was not at home, and had actually lowered the camera, when a glimpse of her beak brought me to the ready. Her spring followed in a flash: she was clear of rocks and trees, soaring out into the sky, before I visualised her movement. But somewhen during the rush the shutter had been released, and I believed that the camera was steady. Only fortune could determine if and when I had caught her.

That evening's developing was among the great hours of life. At last a printable Raven, a picture the more interesting as showing the characteristic unfolding of the wings, and a Buzzard at the top of her first stroke, just clear of the ledge, the mighty pinion curving to its descent. If the weather had not been so bright, if I had not invested in a box of backed Eclipse plates, under-exposures would have been inevitable. As it was, patience and effort had been rewarded.

It was not till May 12th that I again got a day with the

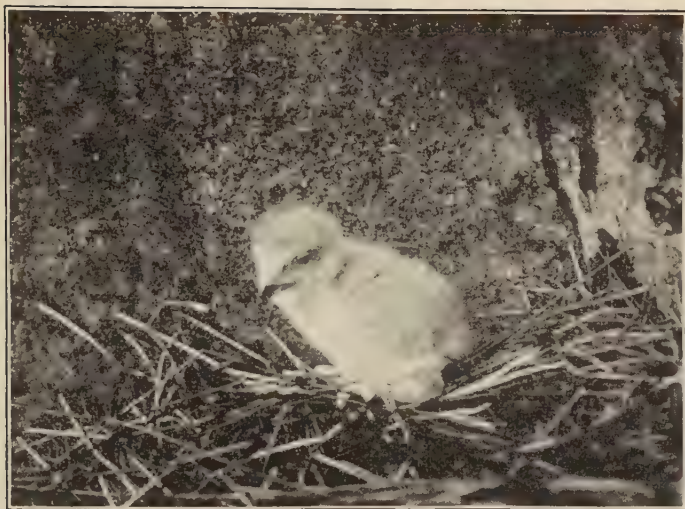
Ravens. Then as we climbed the hill the cock bird met us in the air ; and as we approached the summit he patrolled the whole length of it. To watch him was sheer joy, though now he was unusually silent. He would beat leisurely up with slow strokes of his great ragged-edged wings ; then sail majestically with every primary spread wide ; and then with a triple bark he would flex his quills back till they were parallel to the body and held out a few inches from it, and nose-dive steeply, rolling over first to the right and then to the left on a drop of near a hundred feet. This plunge of the Raven is not unlike the dive of a Gannet : the wings are folded back in the same fashion, and there is the same spin first to one side and then to the other. It is not a corkscrew turn : the bird reverses the direction of its twist midway in the descent. And whereas the Gannet drops like a plummet into the sea, the Raven when he has reached the level of his desire spreads his wings and flattens out his course. This is not his nuptial roll : then he loses little or no altitude, but just turns over on to his side or, as some maintain, even on to his back. Here he is merely making a rapid descent.

From his action I judged that the young, who always leave the nest at the earliest possible moment, were already on the hill ; but when we reached our yew, the hen's appearance apparently from her home corrected my judgment. When we got down, the nest seemed empty : its occupants, if there, were obeying instructions and lying low. But as we watched, impatience prevailed over discipline. A black-feathered head, an open beak, a bright pink gape, appeared over the lining of sheep's wool, and for a moment or two were waved before us. Then the cries of his parents enforced obedience : he disappeared ; and I was satisfied to spend a happy hour taking snapshots of the old

birds wheeling round the rocks. If only my visit had been less brief it would have been wonderful to see the youngster lured out of the nest and conducted step by step through his slow initiation into the freedom of the air.

Even so it was hard to devote all the time to Ravens and Buzzards when there were so many other delightful claims upon us. On the hill-side there were Magpies, Jackdaws and Carrion Crows, Kestrels, Tawny Owls and Stock Doves, Ring Ousels, Wheatears, Redstarts, Tree and Meadow Pipits. In the valley were Dippers, Grey Wag-tails, Marsh Tits and Common Sandpipers; on the lake, Herons and an occasional bunch of Golden-eyes; and in the gardens, Long-tailed Tits, Coal Tits, Tree Creepers and late in April the Pied Flycatcher. I have lost my heart to many birds—to the Puffin, to the Little Tern, to the Shoveller, to the Stone Curlew, to the Avocet: they will not be jealous; and I am impressionable rather than fickle. But to see the Piedy, as my good friend Ted the gardener calls him, combining in himself the sprightliness of a Tit, the grace of a Goldfinch, the bravado of a Wheatear, the fearlessness of a Redbreast, and the distinction of a Wagtail, is to be captivated by him. I confess with some shame that normally I like big birds better than small, partly because they are so much easier to watch, partly because size is impressive. But the Piedy made me renounce my preference. He was new to me. I had seen a young bird once at Holkham on migration, and spotted his species by the black, white-edged tail. But to watch the cock at close quarters nest-building, and later to open the lid of the box and look down on to his mate's back with its colouring as delicately shaded with green and fawn and pink as his is boldly defined, this was a revelation of fresh delights. Their memory kept me cheerful when my duties called me

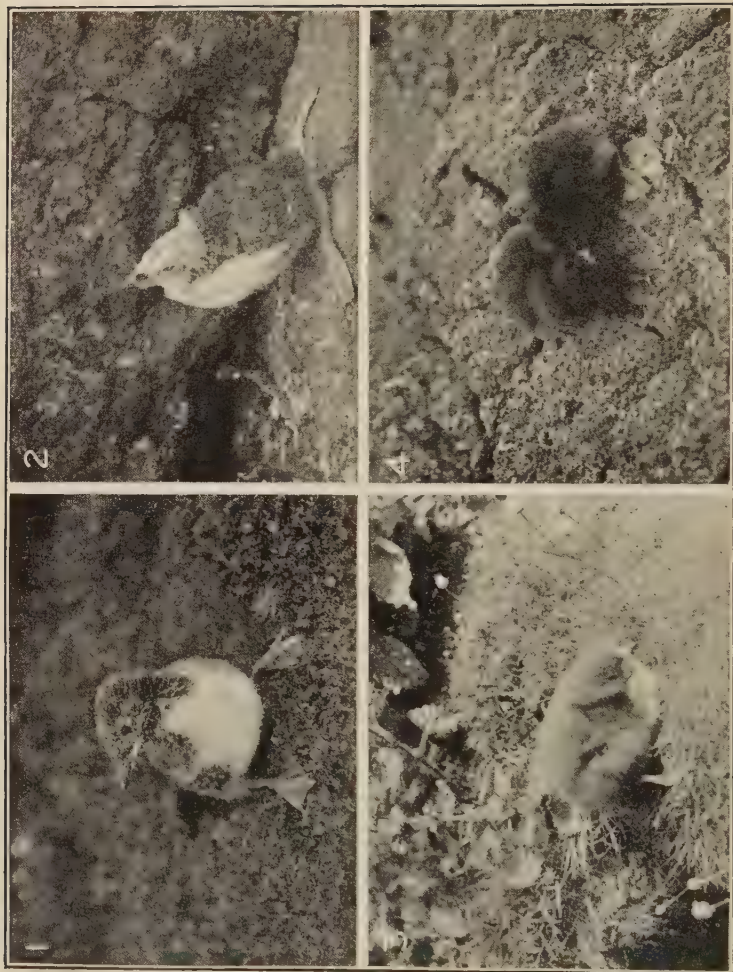
back to the city from their haunts. Like T. E. Brown, nearly if not quite my favourite of the lesser poets, I do my job in London or Liverpool all the better if I can thank God, not indeed for Bradda and Barrule and Glen Chass, but for Bloemendaal and the Waal en Burg, Howth and Helvellyn and Y Tryfan ; and like him it is only at times and with part of my mind that I prefer play to work or the country to the town.



BUZZARD, 7 days old



PUFFINS



1. GUILLEMOT,
5 days old

2. RAZORBILL,
7 days old

3. PUFFIN, 3 days old

4. BLACK GUILLEMOT,
newly hatched

CHAPTER II

THE PUFFINS AND THEIR ISLAND

IT was a great adventure, one of those brilliant ideas which visit us when we are idle and happy, and fascinate us for an hour of dreaming, and then are reluctantly allowed to fade as we realise how utterly their fulfilment exceeds our resources. Mr. Coward and I conceived it, one morning in Texel, when we were wondering how we could ever show to our host some tiny portion of our gratitude. It began as a plan for twelve months ahead. We were to persuade M. Burdet to desert his dunes and polders and pay a visit to the moorlands of the Peak, the hills of Westmorland and the coast of Anglesey. Between us we reckoned that we could find him a bunch of new subjects for film and stereo, and, if he could spare us a fortnight, show him good hunting. Obviously somewhere cliffs and sea-birds must be included; for though he had visited the Bass Rock, all the usual inhabitants of such places would be fresh to him. Puffin Island was a fairly obvious proposal. I had always thought of it as a haunt of Llandudno trippers—one of those show places where a few *blasé* birds perform before an admiring crowd, and as therefore hopeless for the photographer. How such an impression originated I can't imagine—probably a memory of my mother's description of her visit to the island from Llandudno fifty years ago, blended with a lurid recollection of a chapter in Mr. Boraston's book. Coward disabused me;

and having once learnt that Puffins were really there, an ancient passion revived with overwhelming force, and I knew that for me the expedition could not be postponed twelve months. There were two days at the end of June that had been saved for a last look at the Pied Flycatchers: why not use them on a trial trip to the island—a preliminary survey for the campaign of next year? So with the recklessness of infatuation I straightway planned a first essay on June 29th and 30th; mentioned the next-year scheme to M. Burdet and my proposal for an immediate visit; found that he was keen; and in five minutes had settled that he, Coward and I, four days after we left him and Holland, should reassemble in Liverpool and go off together to the sea-front.

Looked at in the cold light of next day it seemed sheer lunacy. I was still sceptical of the very existence of nesting birds, and knew nothing of the possibilities for photography. We had two days and no more: suppose it rained or blew a gale? Burdet was not too well, and would have the journey from Haarlem to Liverpool before the real expedition began; England had a coal strike and skeleton train services; Mrs. MacIver and Joel (a sports Alvis with a speed as amazing as his driver's skill) might not be free; and if so could we ask her to carry us, and then could the car hold us and our baggage? I would not have ensured the success or even the attempting of the excursion on any conceivable terms. Its performance depended on far too many incalculable chances. Still we were committed to it; and after all the kindness of the Burdets could not for very shame cry off, or insinuate that it might not be feasible.

For some days I would have given anything to undo my rash, my criminally rash, proposal. Poor Burdet

would come to England and be taken ill; or there would be no car; or the weather would be vile; or we should get there after Herculean labours and find that there were no birds. Courage returned when Peter (my wife's name for Mrs. MacIver, who ought really to be Cousin Florence, but is much more like Peter) undertook the job. I am a fool at organisation: she is a marvel of competence. At least we should get there. And Coward was clear about the birds and confident that they could be filmed. And I longed to see them so much that really fears could not hold out against excitement. Indeed when, at the end of my visit, Burdet got sadly over-tired and wanted to cry off, I felt a wave of disappointment at what (I confess) would have given me relief a week before.

I left Holland on June 24th, Burdet was to follow me on the 26th, reaching Liverpool on the evening of the 27th, and resting after his journey on the 28th. On the 27th, a Sunday, I was doing Sunday School sermons and walks in the outskirts of Wigan in the morning and afternoon, and more Sunday Schools in Everton at evensong. On my return there was no sign of Burdet. The Customs at Harwich—well, I am moderately patriotic, but the contrast between the courtesy and ease with which an Englishman enters Holland and the incivility and obstacles with which he is welcomed home makes me blush for my country. Burdet had brought his cinema and films. He was, of course, held up, assured that his film could not be admitted, forced to spend twenty-four hours at Harwich, a cheery spot for a lonely Sabbath, and only allowed to proceed on Monday after paying a deposit of enormous magnitude. Fortunately (for me) there is no Sunday night boat: otherwise he admitted that he would have gone straight home.

However, a telegram on Monday assured us that he

was in England, and that evening he arrived. After forty-eight hours on the way he was still as cheerful as a school-boy, wonderfully fit, and with all his apparatus intact. Dear man, it was a comfort that thereafter his expedition went without a hitch.

To begin with it was glorious weather, the sort that one associates with June but seldom receives. Then Coward turned up from Bowden full of good cheer. And finally Joel carried his burdens as a prophet should. We packed him up that night—two tents, a cinema-camera and stand, my camera and four suit-cases—and it seemed still possible to get four human beings on board. Peter had maps, permits, arrangements with a hotel at Beaumaris and with a boatman. We went to bed bright and early, to breakfast at six and cross the Mersey ferry at seven.

It was a perfect morning when our expedition set off, perfect too the river and the roads. We made our first halt at Denbigh just before nine, and felt that at long last Puffins were actually in prospect. Till then I at least had hardly dared to anticipate. Suddenly the future burst on me. I have confessed elsewhere that my passion for the Puffin dates from the nursery, and that never, save once on Ireland's Eye and again for a few minutes at the Farnes, has it been gratified. And now that very day I should see, and not only see but photograph. Coward assured me that it was a certainty; and at last I knew that he was right. After all the fears and misgivings now it was a certainty. Nothing for the next thirty-six hours would go wrong. We were fey. There are few moments so wonderful as those in which one realises that the unbelievable has happened, that the unattainable has been achieved.

The rest of the drive left little room for anticipations—even of Puffins. The Denbigh moors were new land to

me—new but recalling the long stretch between the Arenigs from Frongoch to Festiniog, where I learnt to ride a pony five-and-twenty years ago. To climb to their crest in the prime of a summer morning and to travel it with the cries of Peewits and Curlews in one's ears and glimpses of Grouse and the Gulls that nest on the little lakes to keep one watchful; then on a sudden to see silhouetted against the blue the whole range of the mountains between us and our goal, and to run down the worst road in the world to Pentrevoelas and exchange the bare expanse of heather and rough grass for the woodland and stream of the Fairy Glen—life was very good on such a day, in such a place. After Bettws I knew my way, and knew that the most beautiful pass in the Principality was before us. When once you have got free from the boarding-houses and charabancs, and the queue even at that early hour already lining up at the Swallow Falls, and Siabod begins to peer over the trees of the valley, and you lean forward to get the first glimpse of Snowdon, you must be hard to please if you are not enraptured. But it is when you have swung to the right from Capel Curig, and when, as you are gazing at the escarpment of the Carnedd's, you turn and first see Y Tryfan, that the real zenith of your rapture is reached. I sat for the most impressionable years of my life in a sixth-form room where the chief distraction was a faded photograph of a mountain. I believe it was Sinai; at least it was rugged and lowering, a fit home for the thunders of Jehovah; and for me it became the ideal of what a mountain should be, the exemplar by which all earthly summits should be tested. Never shall I forget when first I saw a mountain in reality. It was Skiddaw, at the end of a long hot holiday journey from London; and with my mental image well in view it looked about as

imposing as the Hog's Back. Even the Alps—dare I confess it?—though they thrilled me with awe and wonder, with the goddess grandeur of their peerless shapes rising through virgin veils of snow, struck a different and less tremendous chord in my soul. Tryfan with his feet set in the leaden lake, Tryfan first seen against a sky of lurid storm, Tryfan, all black rock and stark riven precipice, was my mountain. Even now though the glamour has faded, and when in the sunshine I can see him in proportion, he is still to me, as no other, a haunt of ancient dread. And Burdet, the mountaineer, the Swiss who now lives in a land where mountains are unknown, felt as I did. We came down to the pleasant greenery of Bangor and the smiling beauty of the Straits, as travellers from the high places come into the Italian plains—purified, exalted, thankful, quick to respond to every touch of beauty, sensitive to the meaning of earth's manifold magic, yet at the core of the heart aloof, as those should be who are initiated into the mystery of the eternal hills.

Is this too grandiose for the description of so ordinary a journey? Is it ridiculous to ascribe sublimities to a party of bird-lovers racing off to Puffin Island with all the appearance of tourists in a very modern motor-car? We who live in cities, who have never been to the wonderlands of romance, must find our golden road to Samarkand where we may. If the globe-trotter or the man of the world mocks because we found glamour in a scene which hundreds visit in charabancs all the summer through, let him sneer to his heart's content. If he is wise, he will feel a pang of envy that such little things can still please our little minds, envy that he is spoiled for the simple enjoyment of what is near at hand.

And so we came to Beaumaris, to a gracious welcome

at our hotel, and to Mr. Hughes, the boatman, waiting for his instructions. It was then something after eleven. We would lunch, drive to Penmon Point, and there take boat and away. So it was arranged, and so fulfilled. At 2.30 we stepped on to the little beach beyond the long ridge of rock that marks the old causeway from the island to the mainland coast of Wales.

Puffin Island does not look romantic. Seen across the channel it is a rounded hummock with a low fringe of cliff, green-capped and crowned by a ruined tower. As we came up to it there were Shags on a rock to the left, Guillemots in the fissures behind them, and Gulls everywhere. But there was little time to wonder whether this was all. The little path from the beach led us at once to that for which we came.

The island is, and is increasingly becoming, a vast gullery. That much is evident at once. Every rock on its southern front is tenanted by Herring Gulls, and the dense herbage which covers all but the northern fringe above the cliffs is thick with them. Lesser Black-backs, though their numbers are not one in twenty, are very numerous. They were nesting in two chief groups, and whereas practically all the Herrings had hatched off, and the young in all stages were hiding in every scrape and burrow, or gathered in groups nearly full-fledged on the edge of the rocks, most of the Black-backs were still sitting. Coward was dismayed at the increase of the Gulls and at their encroachment upon the other species. But for me it was at once apparent that our special quarry was by no means lacking. A Razorbill flew past as we were breasting the first yards of the track. As we reached the top of the western cliff a group of Puffins sat before us. A hundred yards further we looked over and saw rows of Guillemots

on the narrow ledges and a Kittiwake's nest glued to a tiny cornice far below. The birds were there: could we make pictures of them?

Chief among the pious resolutions with which one visits a haunt of birds is this, that one will never make an exposure until the ground has been reasonably surveyed. Experience proves over and over again that where subjects are plentiful and plates limited it is the wildest folly to waste one's shots until the best position and opportunities have been explored. Like all such resolutions, this is for me a counsel of perfection. And in this case I had wanted Puffins for years, and every minute's delay was an outrage. Courtesy demanded that our guest should first be satisfied: we must find a spot for his tent, and see him duly installed. Leaving him on the path in a jungle of overgrown weeds, Coward and I set out to discover the Puffin colony. The few birds we had seen could only be outliers: at least they must be left until we were sure that they were all. It was when we had passed to the north of the tower that we found a bare slope running to the lip of the rocks and honeycombed with burrows—and Puffins in abundance: Puffins standing in solemn groups, Puffins running to and fro between the holes, Puffins skimming past, their beaks adorned with fringes of silver fry, Puffins sitting in the faults and crannies of the cliff, Puffins everywhere. Coward declared that their numbers were sadly diminished, that vegetation and the Gulls had spoiled the best of their breeding-ground; but for me the multitude of them and their tameness were beyond belief. Clearly there was no need to go further. We could begin at once.

So the big tent was erected and the cinema set up and focussed and M. Burdet left to his vigil. And over the next rise, so as not to disturb him, I also set up my hide,

and at last was ready for the expected event. The Puffin seen in a picture-book is merely grotesque. He looks stiff and awkward and self-conscious, overburdened by the horror of his amazing beak. In real life he is still grotesque—"God made him for a joke," declared a friend of mine; but he is much more. He is a singularly alert, competent, active, fearless little bird, with a wise, wistful, rather worried expression, the sort of person one wants to pick up and pet. That is perhaps the reason why one cannot resist the temptation to plunge one's hand into his burrow, and, if he (or she) is at home, lay hold and make his closer acquaintance. If so, he does not seem to appreciate one's interest, but bites and scratches in a fashion that belies his wistful face, bites efficiently as with a beak provided for the purpose, and scratches with the zest learned in scraping out his home. Yet though he resents familiarity and keeps his domestic arrangements in strict privacy, he is entirely free from shyness or any exaggerated concern for human intruders. If you sit on the mouth of his burrow, he will walk up to you with a look of philosophic resignation, as who should say, "You're too big for me to turn out; but you're inconveniencing me terribly; and I'm getting tired of waiting for you to move"; and in ten minutes you will have him close up if you keep reasonably still. Thus as a subject for a photographer he is almost too easy. Sea-light makes it possible to stop down and expose rapidly, and the bird seems to pose almost consciously. I had long admired, and I'm afraid coveted, the pictures of groups of Puffins which adorn most bird books, and wondered by what device such admirable portraits were secured. Now I realised that if once one could visit their home, Puffins were easier to take than a cock sparrow in a back garden. Burdet and I stayed perhaps half an hour in our tents,

took as many photographs as we wanted, and then almost simultaneously decided that for such work hides were superfluous.

Having brought a tent and wanting a Lesser Black-back I decided to use it for him. Gulls are suspicious brutes, and without it the chance of success would be small. With it the birds came down almost at once, and the cock took up his position on guard some twenty yards away. The hen was not happy, walked round me several times and circled over for long but diminishing intervals. Finally, in about forty minutes, she walked cautiously up to her eggs, and was added to my list of birds successfully interviewed.

The real joy of the island began when we substituted searching and stalking for lying up. The cliffs are almost ideal for the purpose. At the north-west corner they are high and sheer: ledges are few and quite inaccessible without a rope. But on the rest of the north side they are admirable—good sound limestone, wonderfully terraced and broken into fissures and tunnels. Some of the horizontal cracks lead back deep into the island: indeed it seemed pretty evident that the Puffin burrows in the soil at the top had in some cases back-doors giving directly on to the face. Certainly Puffins tenanted the clefts of the “top storey.” And with them were Razorbills in plenty, laying their eggs well inside the tiny caverns and sitting *ventre à terre* in positions impossible to photograph and difficult to reach without a stick. The Guillemots on occasion shared the same sites, and there crouched low upon their eggs in true Razorbill style. But for the most part they had the open ledges, and chose only those which were difficult of access. The formation of the cliff does not suit them so well as their cousins; and though there were plenty to be seen, they were probably less numerous than

the Razorbills. The Kittiwakes are few and far between—not more than two dozen pairs all told—and all on the narrowest ledges or wee brackets just big enough to support the compact and solid nest. Some few Herring Gulls had invaded the ground floor or under-cliff, a wide shelf of flat rocks broken by one or two impassable gullies, but for some distance accessible from its eastern end. Near the north-east corner a pair of Ravens had reared a brood. On the slope below their site were the clean-picked bones and dried wings of many Puffins, victims of their brood or of the Gulls, probably, to my thinking, of the former. The Great Black-back is, of course, a ruthless murderer: possibly his smaller cousin shares his crimes. But the number of corpses was hardly enough to be the work of Gulls, unless indeed a taste for Puffin belonged only to a few villains of the company.

The exploration of the cliffs for good view-points occupied most of the rest of our visit, and for sheer excitement was the cream of it. I am, alas! a perfect fool on rocks. My head is indifferent, my sense of balance defective and my muscles are inadequate. And worst of all, when I see a companion in a place that looks bad, my knees turn to jelly and my stomach sinks with fear. Of course I have never had any practice, which accounts to some extent for my clumsiness; but even so, climbing of the teeth and toenail type is a pursuit at which I could never be of any use. Indeed it had always seemed pretty hopeless to attempt the cliff-breeders, unless some day I could visit the Saltees, or one of the few places where you can take a camera to its victim as easily as carry it upstairs. So it was a delight, all the more acute for being unexpected, to find that on Puffin Island I could get within range of all its inhabitants without an utter collapse or too indecent a display of

funk. And we had a splendid guide. Peter has muscles of iron and nerves of steel, and an instinct for what can be done. When first I saw her standing on the tip of an overhanging tongue of rock, and exhorting me to come and see a baby Kittiwake thirty feet below and behind, I —no, my feelings are best left undescribed. But as I discovered how completely unruffled she was, and how admirably able to take care of herself, I took heart of grace, and to most of the places could follow with the camera.

And what places they were! One in particular is memorable. You clamber down over big boulders, lower yourself down a crevice on to a wide ledge, follow it as it runs half-way down the cliff, and reach a spot where, silhouetted against sea and sky, are wonderful tiers of rock, shaped roughly like the prow of an ancient galley, and tenanted on the lowest ledge by Guillemots and higher up under the overhang by Razorbills and Puffins. One could get to within twenty feet of the Guillemots, and, after the chorus of groans and growls had subsided, could watch them at close quarters turning their backs to the sea, sidling up to their eggs, squatting with an air of apology above them, tucking in the pointed ends between their feet, puffing out the belly-feathers to conceal them, and standing up half-erect in their typical incubating posture. And above the beak of the galley was a favourite seat of Razorbills. By setting up the camera in range and waiting quietly for a few minutes, the birds could be pictured with ease. The Razorbill is more silent and sedate than his relative, a darker, stiffer figure, much less active on his feet, much shorter in the neck, and, like the Guillemot but not the Puffin, walking on the whole of the tarsus.

A few yards further was the one approachable Kittiwake, a nest with a single egg on a narrow ledge some fifteen feet

to the left and below a projecting rock. I had no mind to sit out on the point of overhang; but at its inner edge the boulder was separated from the main cliff by a fissure in which I could stand securely, and focus with the lens tilted forward, and await the mother bird's return. Dear lady, she kept me waiting a horribly long time, while she circled miserably round and round or perched on a watch-tower out of sight. But at last after several abortive attempts, and just when I was feeling that my hand would get cramp and drop the camera, she alighted by the nest, slewed up her head to gaze at me, and gave me what I wanted.

The afternoon had passed long before all was finished. Indeed my plates had been so lavishly used upon the Puffins that several of the choicest spots had to be left till next day. We crossed happily to Penmon—is there any joy like that of introducing an honoured friend to new and much-praised scenes, and finding that the reality exceeds his expectation?—got back to the hotel for supper, and spent a perfect evening watching the light fade upon the mountains and dreaming the old, old dream of the beauty and goodness of the earth. And for myself, who am a prosaic soul and can always raise a smile from M. Burdet by my eagerness to complete my photographs, I found a friendly chemist, got him to let me into his dark-room after hours, recharged my slides, and saw my first pictures of the Puffin develop into worthy negatives; and then slept the childhood sleep of untroubled oblivion.

Next morning we were early astir. It was again a perfect day; and by nine we were being rowed round our island to land, as can be done at low water, in an inlet of the northern rocks. To revisit old haunts and discover new ones; to take the pictures for which there had been no

plates before; to explore a multitude of burrows, and at last find one with an eligible Puffin baby—a little ball of dark brown fluff with a short stub of a beak and lead-coloured legs and feet, who scuttled back underground as soon as his portrait had been taken; to end up with a search for young Gulls lying hidden among the nettles or squatting in the mouths of the Puffin-holes; and to hear from M. Burdet that he had taken four rolls of film and all the birds that he wanted, made a busy morning's work. We failed to find any young Guillemots or Razorbills, though many of the eggs looked very soiled and near their hatching; but one nest of Black-backs had a chick and a chipped egg, and probably others had hatched off and were among the young Herring Gulls. A nest of an Oystercatcher had three eggs; and this pair seemed to be the only one still breeding on the island, though there were plenty of the birds and some Curlew in the Straits.

We left at three, had a large tea at Beaumaris, and started home about five. Beyond a scud of rain in the Nant-francon pass, the evening was as beautiful as the day. We got a meal at Denbigh, crossed Queen's Ferry soon after ten, and caught the 10.30 boat at Woodside with a minute or two to spare. Burdet voiced the opinion of us all when he said that he had never known a more completely successful expedition. It was indeed one of those rare occasions on which an adventure goes through from start to finish without a hitch and the hopes with which it is undertaken are wholly fulfilled.

Having once tasted the sweets of Puffin Island it was inevitable that I should long to return. Young birds fascinate me even more than their elders; and my pictures of Guillemots were not as good as they might have been. But to desire and to fulfil can seldom be the same for those

who have to live by time-table. June had been a holiday month. July is dedicated to Conferences; and do what I would there was no prospect of a free day until the 20th. Judging by Coward's experience we feared that this would be too late; but Peter and Joel were free, my wife was able to come, Peggy could go with us, and, the wish being father to the thought, we decided that the young birds could not all have grown enough to leave the rocks. If we left at 6.30 and were back by midnight we could get at least four hours on the island.

Once again fortune favoured us. It was a grey dawn—how eagerly we watched it!—but by the time we passed Mold had cleared and for the rest of the day was ideal. And as we sailed down from Min-y-garth it was evident that the birds were still there. All three Auks were on the water, and though the rocks of the causeway had been turned into a kindergarten for young Gulls, plenty of them were still circling above the isle or seated on its upper slopes. When we climbed to the north side the Puffins seemed even more numerous than before. They were there in hundreds, so tame that one had only to choose a favourite stone, wait a few minutes, and get as many portraits as one wanted. Peggy decided at once that the Puffin should be her favourite bird—a choice highly approved by her father. Some of the young must have been ready to leave—for we found a newly-dead bird practically full-fledged on the under-cliff; but we also discovered an infant still in down and not older than the one photographed three weeks before. The Black-backs that I had taken then had hatched off, but the youngsters were squatting just outside the nest.

Our chief task was with Guillemots and Razorbills—to find babies and get some more pictures of the parents. On

the best ledge the Guillemots were very busy: at least one young bird was tucked away in the crevice, but most of the eggs were unhatched. We spent some time watching their comings and goings, the restless movements of their sinuous heads and necks, the constant bickerings over acts of trespass, and the surreptitious and apologetic fashion in which those having eggs made their way to them and settled themselves to brood. And ever and anon a chorus of groans and growls reminiscent of a kennel at feeding-time would break out in queer contrast to the ceaseless clamour of the Gulls, a sound which, like the bagpipes, is in itself unpleasant, but at a distance and in massed effect is one of the most haunting forms of bird music, and with the strange hoarse laugh of the Kittiwakes.

We had a great search for young birds that could be reached by the camera, or extracted from their caverns and brought to an improvised studio. Most of the Razorbills had their eggs far away in the fissures which separated the strata of the limestone and ran back into pitchy darkness. Exploring them was an unsavoury business. The cliff-face was windless and warm, and an ancient and fish-like odour pervaded it, and transferred itself in white powder to clothes and faces. To lie flat on a ledge and peer into the cracks at its inner edge was no task for the sensitive; and when youngsters were located, their first act was to plunge into the recesses and squat like limpets. Many of the eggs were still unhatched, though we had seen one active infant on the water on our first visit. But we eventually disinterred a couple, one almost fledged with his wings in quills and his black scalp fringed with down, a friendly person who opened at us an enormous and mustard-yellow gape; and the other a day or two old, with dusky brown back and breast and cream-white head and nape.

The Kittiwake with the single egg had by this time a well-developed chick in down, perhaps a week old, a uniform pearly-grey with signs of dark round the base of the neck. I took him with his mother from the edge of the rock—rather a feat—and again alone from the crevice; but short of a long pole and a net there was no possibility of a “close-up.” Young Guillemots were very few: one or two were all that we could see; and they were all inaccessible. For a moment indeed I thought that our youngest Razorbill might be a Guillemot; for in the little cavern where we found him there were Guillemots recumbent on their eggs; but the baby was not my idea of a Guillemot, and the fragments of eggshell which we collected beside him were plainly Razorbill. So our quest, though successful beyond our hopes, left us still one species to complete. It was a long and joyous day, the beat back to our moorings, and the race through the dusk by mountain and moor to Dee and Mersey not the least enjoyable part of it.

Next day I was off to London, thence to Swanwick and Oxford, for ten days of Conferences and Summer Schools. It was impossible even to think of birds. But after them there was a day free, July 31st; and Guillemots which had not hatched off on the 20th would still be on the rocks. It was Bank Holiday Saturday, and a bad day for speed on the roads; but if we got to Anglesey the night before we could get our birds early, and leave time to get back to Liverpool for the Sunday.

Once more the kind fates smiled. The drive was even more beautiful in the afternoon; the Snowdon range seen from above Pentrevoelas blue peaks against blue sky, and the mid-distance a wonder of rich colour; even Tryfan looked mellow, his rugged outline haloed with gold; and

the Straits, always lovely, were a river of Paradise, pure glass in the windless sunlight. We set the skipper of our host's yacht to manufacture a landing-net for baby birds; and next morning ran down to Penmon with a twelve-foot bamboo lashed to the car.

Ten days had made a big change in the island. The Gulls were still there, droves of youngsters learning to swim and hover from the fringing rocks, and a few still running flightless on the summit. But the Puffins had almost all departed. Not one in fifty remained; and these were restless and unsociable, obviously anxious to be off and unwilling to waste a moment in session on the cliff-edge or to give the photographer a chance to get near them. A few Razorbills were still at home; but they too were a mere remnant. Our baby Kittiwake had disappeared, and only one of the nests had any occupant. Only the Guillemots were as numerous as ever; the Herring Gulls devour numbers of their eggs, and, nesting on more exposed places, they suffer more heavily than Razorbills or Puffins. To our surprise some were still sitting, though others had youngsters almost ready to move seawards. One indeed from the first ledge that we approached decided to make the attempt, only to fall heavily—I fear fatally—upon the boulders of the under-cliff. We had hoped to get some light on the problem of the transport of the young birds to the sea. How is it that the journey is safely accomplished? One sees youngsters on the water which certainly cannot have flown there: yet before they leave the ledges they are well grown and heavy—too heavy to fall safely or to be easily carried by their parents. With such multitudes of them it ought not to be difficult to observe the whole procedure; but we watched carefully and saw nothing. Friends with greater knowledge tell me that the

old bird seizes the youngster by the wing with her beak, and carries him out until she can drop him safely on to the sea. It would be worth a long watch to observe so strange a journey.

It was fortunate that we had our pole and net : otherwise results would have been small. As it was, the landing of an eligible baby was a job which I could not have managed. There was not a ledge to which one could climb ; that we knew ; and when we came to search there were few within ten feet. Moreover, between the floor and the wall there is almost always a crack ; and baby Guillemots shuffle into it on the smallest alarm and tuck themselves in as tight as they can. Peter found a ledge just within reach, and by lying down and lowering the pole to the vertical could just reach the nursery. To net the baby seemed almost impossible ; for the bamboo was not too rigid ; the young man had no desire to be caught, and to scoop him into the meshes so as to lift him safely was a risky venture. But at last persistence and skill achieved it. There was an awful moment when it seemed that instead of slipping into the bag he might fall over the ring ; but all went well ; he was landed and carried triumphantly to a place of safety. He was probably four or five days old, very white on breast and throat, his upper surface a deep grey covered with thin filaments of white down. In action he was a true son of his race, very active and alert, with the jerky movements of head and neck, and capable of a short burst of speed quite out of keeping with his inability to rise off the tarsus. But he was fearless and friendly, his one notion of self-protection being to dive for my legs as I sat behind the camera and thrust himself under the shadow of what he took for a cliff. He was a fascinating child, as difficult to photograph as a human four-year-old ; I devoted half a

dozen plates to his portrait, and was glad of it, for one of them was perfect, and all the rest were unsatisfactory.

Then we had a great search round the lower rocks, scrambling up from the undercliff and exploring the holes and crevices. A young Razorbill, of an age midway between the two of my previous visit, was our reward. He was perhaps a week old, still cream-headed, and very different in habit from the Guillemot. A sedate, not to say clumsy, person, he sat quite contentedly where we put him, at first prone and then in exactly the attitude of his parents. His first act when he was extracted from his hole was to disgorge three sand-eels, very nearly as long as himself, twisted together into a strand of silver, and swallowed head-first. Sea-birds even in infancy must have a power of digestion that an epicure would envy.

Finally Peter landed another and much larger young Guillemot, a performance which filled me with terror; for to do it she had to stand on a foot-wide ledge and fish him up from another barely wider some eight feet below and with a sheer drop of forty feet beneath it. The youngster wriggled in at the base of the rock till only one leg was visible, but when this had been tickled and tweaked some dozen times by the ring he decided to move, scuttled off to another corner and was thence soon extracted. He was even more difficult to photograph, for he was nearly full-fledged and could run like a racer. But a hat clapped on to him, focussed and suddenly removed, produced opportunities which were easily put to advantage. Poor old hat: after such adventures it is not surprising that my clerical friends and even my wife look at it askance.

And so a long-registered wish was fulfilled, and I had actually visited the sea-birds in their home. Ever since early boyhood such a scene had been in the background of



KITTIWAKE AND YOUNG



GUILLEMOTS



LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL AND NEST



GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULLS

my mind. In the war the principle of compensation had brought it up into my dreams. On Ireland's Eye there had been an all too brief realisation—enough to translate it from the land of make-believe and fix it as, for me, a sort of earthly paradise. And now it had become attainable, and unlike so many hopes the fulfilment had exceeded the anticipation. As I write, I look up at the wall where pictures of a Puffin trying, in spite of his physical disabilities, to look like the German eagle, and of what Betty calls "the Guillemots going to church," carry me back to the island. It exists—and I have seen it—and its people are in some sort my friends. And life is the richer for them.

CHAPTER III

THE HARVEST OF THE SEA

WE had said good-bye to Puffin Island with its few remaining Puffins, and taken our last pictures of baby Guillemots and Razorbills on July 31st. Ten days later the family embarked by "long sea" to Cork for a month's stay in the rectory at Glandore. It was not quite an unprecedented adventure. In the previous summer we had had the locum-tenency of Crosshaven, a delicious little village looking across the harbour to Queenstown and with the open sea half a mile away over the hill. To one of us at least Irish hospitality was no new thing. And with memories of Howth and Bray and my dream-island the splendour of the coast was taken for granted. And yet—and yet—well, my friends in Dublin know that they will always come first. But their kinsmen in the South are true to the same tradition both in friendliness and in the joy of beauty. And how they spoiled us! Up the Owenboy to Drake's Pool, where the trees mirror themselves in the river and the salmon leap at the flood-tide, and to Carrigaline, where on the ebb the Curlew come down from the fields and the Redshanks scatter over the flats, and a stately Heron flops leisurely from bank to bank, and the Common Gulls join the Black-heads and bathe away the hours till the stream fills and brings them good hunting. Or down the coast to Ringabella where porpoises and Cormorants below and Gannets above take their fill of

fishing, and at low water Rooks and Grey Crows join the Gulls and Oystercatchers on the rocks, and Wagtails, Pied and Grey, and Pipits, Rock and Meadow, swarm over the stranded seaweed. Or further afield, when kind parishioners or my dear friend and erstwhile Rural Dean, Canon Irwin of Killanully, took us out in their cars to Rocky Bay, or Garrett's Town, or, a very memorable excursion, to Man-of-War Cove and the Reanies. There I saw my first Chough, just a glimpse of red legs and beak above the cliff, and watched the Rock Doves still tending their nests, and Betty saw her first Peregrine, and sat hard on Daddy's legs while he hung over the edge to photograph a group of Shags on a rock three hundred feet below. It was a golden summer in a wonder-land of varied beauty; every mile of coast with a new charm of rugged headland or smiling bay, and each with its tiny caves and gorges, pools and water-gardens, shingle and sand: a wonder-land too in its shells and seaweeds, anemones and hermit-crabs and the children's treasury of flotsam and jetsam. I was feeling rather senile that summer: my fortieth birthday had come in July, and with it the consciousness that I could no longer pretend to belong to the younger generation or even to be as youthful as flattering friends said that I looked. County Cork knocked many years off my age and gave a recipe for perennial boyhood. When you, my dear reader, next feel antique, beg, borrow or invite a party of children, assorted ages from seven to fourteen, who have never before seen a rocky foreshore, and take them to it. You will be smuggler and pirate, fisherman and naturalist, architect and engineer, explorer and alpinist, and a dozen other joyous adventurers within the first twelve hours. Off will slip the burden of years, of dignity and respectability, as you splash in and out of your secret harbour, and build

your feudal fortress, and probe among the pools for gobies, and scrape your shins upon limpets and barnacles, and fill your hair and ears with sand, your pockets with cowries and your soul with peace. Sea and sun and laughter will do more for you than ever the magic cauldron did for Æson, or Jordan for Naaman. You will be a child again, and happy.

It was a glorious holiday; but for birds something of a disappointment. August is the dullest month in the year—or so they tell us—for the bird-student. And here, though there was much variety, none of it was very unusual, and photographs were few and far between. Indeed apart from a few not wholly barren stalks with a reflex camera, an amusing game but yielding small and very casual results, I came back with little to record and still less to print. At first indeed I had had great hopes of playing Miss Turner's game of "wait and see," and had carried my tent long miles on the chance of Herons or Curlew. The Ringabella estuary seemed admirably suited to it. There were nice sand-banks and shingle-ridges appearing seductively as the tide ebbed, and a constant movement of waders and gulls up and down at high water. And the mud-flats towards Carrigaline, alive with Curlew and Redshank, were covered at the flood; and the birds must surely come inshore. I waited all right—a good many odd hours. But the birds went elsewhere, even when I collected a great store of prawn-heads and relics of dead fish and spread them as an enticement for the hungry. The Curlew moved away altogether, forming big flocks and resorting to the grass fields. The Oystercatchers flew off to the rocks under the cliffs on the edge of the sea. The Redshanks also mustered in packs—and went anywhere except in my neighbourhood. And the Gulls—even the Black-heads, who are always

hungry and inquisitive—slept till the tide turned. Stalking was much better fun ; and I never left my camera at home. But if one got a printable result once in five shots, it was a good day ; and the best subjects were always among the failures.

Probably one had expected too much. As we crossed, the sea had been full of birds. Manx Shearwaters at all times ; Gannets fairly frequent ; Gulls only absent during the hours of darkness ; and near land little groups and family parties of Guillemots, Razorbills and occasional Puffins. But when we arrived, Cormorants and Shags, Herring Gulls and Black-heads were the only sea-birds we saw, except one day late in August, when a Common Tern, with a very white forehead, dozed away an hour or two on the rocks below Myrtleville. We heard indeed great stories of the autumn days when the whitebait come in, with the mackerel driving them on to the rocks, and the dog-fish and porpoises hurrying on the mackerel—days when air and sea are full of fowl, who gorge themselves till they get too heavy to fly and too happy to care for mankind. But those days, if indeed they existed outside the imagination of the teller, were not for us. Before them, if they ever came, we were back in Liverpool, and the camera, like Cæsar's legions, had gone into winter quarters.

So it was with little hope of photography that we set out to Glandore ; and as it happened the passage raised no expectations. We skirted Anglesey in the dusk, and caught a glimpse of Puffin Island far away against the Straits ; but its inhabitants gave us no greeting. Indeed until we were off Cork Harbour there was nothing but the attendant Herring Gulls, and once or twice far away a Gannet. And even then though a few Guillemots, each with a newly-fledged youngster in attendance, a Shag or

two, and a few Great Black-backs were spotted by one or other of the family, the sea was relatively empty. A lovely journey, but dull, was my comment—unexpressed; for when all the family had escaped sea-sickness and Canon Irvin was waving to us from the quay, and we were actually back in Ireland, a complaint would have been ungrateful and ungracious. Indeed after such a season as I had had, one need not lament an August empty of birds.

It is a queer thing for one whose fate it is to have no drop of Irish blood in his veins to feel the thrill of a home-coming whenever he sets foot in the sister island. But for me, I confess, the sound of their voices, and the colour of their land, and even the squalor of their streets, and above all their unfailing charm and kindliness, have long ago held me a fascinated captive. It may be the memory of my first visit—a story never to be forgotten. It may be the dream-day on Ireland's Eye, of which I have tried to write worthily elsewhere. It may be—well, in my cricketing days a candid friend told me that I was the sort of bowler he would like to carry in his bag, and put on when he went in, and a speaker would do the same if he could with an Irish audience. Whatever is the cause, its effect can only be described in one word, and that word is home. And every visit deepens the impression.

And this time it was deepened indeed. One day, please God, I shall see Glengariff and Killarney, and beat out of Valencia to the Skelligs; and then perhaps shall have seen the best of it. Meanwhile, if Crosshaven was last year the fairest place on earth, its beauty was as nothing to Glandore. You have seen it?—lucky man. You have not?—then come soon; and meanwhile get an artist in words to describe it. I cannot, though the view from my study window is before me as I write. And after all, my

concern is with birds, not scenery. Get a map, and if you have imagination you will understand the heaven of its peace.

We were introduced to it under the kindest auspices. Mr. Boardman, the rector, was a bachelor; and his courage in welcoming to his house a strange parson, his wife and four children had raised our hopes high. He stayed with us, and did all the parish work, except the Sunday sermons. And before long the family adopted him as "Uncle John." The experienced will know that no more need be said. And his house was the best parsonage in the diocese for situation and comfort. Within a hundred yards was his chief parishioner, Mr. Robert Travers, sometime of Timoleague, who met us in his car at Clonakilty and devoted his every day to carrying us off in a motor-boat to explore and picnic and fish and photograph. Brave soul: he made his offer in blissful ignorance of our capacities for the sea, and when we very promptly took advantage of it, I wondered if we should repay him by being violently unwell. My son and I are or have been hitherto immune; and my wife is experienced and safe; but the rest made me anxious. He very wisely tested us after a first run. Our second day was one of bright sun and steady south-west wind. We left the bay on a falling tide which the breeze was piling up into short steep waves. "Now I'll take you round High Island," he said; and I knew that it was our crisis. None of us ever enjoyed the sea so much; and never have we seen it so beautiful. The island rises almost sheer: it must be a marvellous haunt of sea-fowl a month earlier. Now the breeding birds had left it, though some Guillemots with newly-feathered young were on the water not far away; and its denizens were only Herring Gulls, Great Black-backs—perhaps a dozen pairs—Shags and a few

seals. But the beauty of it! A great grey cliff, broken into massive buttresses and pinnacles, and black at its base against the far-flung fountains of the spray. And in front a sea of sapphire, transparent as if lighted from below, and shading down through brilliant cobalt to the colour of paradise, the colour of alpine waterfalls in winter, the colour of the blue topaz, the colour which stops the breath with its loveliness. We came to it a drenched and noisy crew, and the sheer wonder of it made us forget the glee of our buffeting, the glamour of a little boat on lively water. We came and passed, and were admitted as free of the boat and the coast: where she could go, we could go in her.

And thereafter each day had its own delight. It is the peculiar charm of the southern seaboard that every mile has its inlet, ranging from tiny coves where there is scarcely room to turn a boat, to noble fiords like our own at Glandore. Every one of them is distinct and individual with a beauty all its own. We explored perhaps a dozen of them, great and small—a rock-girt inlet with a field of oats running down between the cliffs to its beach; a chasm between giant crags with a wee strand from which a track zigzagged steeply to their summit; Mill Cove with its jetty and burnt-out coastguard station, and in the hill above the awesome cleft of Pouladav, a hundred yards long and scarcely fifteen wide, with stark precipices falling two hundred feet to the eddying waters which pour in through subterranean caverns from the western and the southern sea; Rabbit Island, a mile of barrier rock broken off from the land, with its wee farm, and bits of pasturage and tilth cut out of the gorse and heather wherever there is any depth of earth; Low Island, a reef sheltered by outlying pinnacles and islets, thick with matted vegetation, haunted by seals and Great Black-backs and, when we saw it, by a

big flock of Mallards ; Horse Island with its ruined tower and cottage, rising steep at the mouth of Castle Townsend Bay, where we saw our first Whimbrel ; Sheep's Bay, almost inaccessible from the land, where I watched a pair of Choughs hunting the rocks, and longed all in vain that they would bring their green-glossed plumage and bright red legs and beaks within range of the camera ; Ross Carbery with its swirling river cutting the golden, wood-fringed sands ; Ownahinchy, where the sea behind the shelter of Galley Head is margined with dunes and the Sand Martins dig their tunnels at the meeting-point of sand-hills and cliffs ; Dunworly, where the rock is fused and twisted and dyed to gold and bronze, carmine and crimson, and House Martins and Rock Doves share the caves. Travers had been in charge of coast-defence during the war, and been burnt out twice for his patriotism, and knew every inch of it, land and sea alike ; and almost daily for the three weeks of our stay he introduced us to new beauties and helped us to explore them.

At first the birds were relatively few, though every morning we were wakened at dawn by the chatter of a family of Magpies ; and on the eastern cliffs we watched a pair of Ravens ; and Rabbit Island had a brood of Grey Crows ; and Herring Gulls and Great Black-backs and Oystercatchers tenanted the whole coast ; and Ross Carbery sheltered a flock of Curlew many hundreds strong ; and a few Purple Sandpipers were noted on the rocks and, I think, a Greenshank once on the sand ; and when we arrived the Terns were still feeding young on Eve, the little isle set in the mouth of the bay ; and Cormorants and Herons haunted Glandore ; and Shags sat in lines on the outer reefs. From the boat we could get an occasional picture. Stalking from it was far easier than from the

land; the birds do not look for danger from the water, and boats are familiar. As even the Curlew can be approached by the carts that visit the shore for sand and seaweed, so our passage hardly disturbed these other fishers at their rest or in their business. A Herring Gull swooping to the water, a Cormorant in the act of diving, a Heron flapping from headland to headland—these were pleasant trophies of many radiant hours. But fishing was poor; the birds were obviously few—just the regular inhabitants who stay on “point duty” or patrol a beat, winning in all weathers a sufficient livelihood from the jetsam of the tide.

It was not till Wednesday, the 25th, that the change came. Before it there had been days of strong south-westerly winds, rising on the Saturday to near a gale. “Never been out in worse,” said Andy, the boatman, when he landed us drenched to the skin but riotously happy after a long and boisterous passage from Mill Cove. Tuesday was wet; and I was away beyond Skibbereen at a clerical meeting. Next morning was fine and calm—the sea like watered silk, and under the rocks full of treacly reflections, coiling snakes of bronze among the blue. And the birds had increased. Great packs of Herring Gulls were sitting at rest on sea and shore: on the turrets of cliff Great Black-backs were watching, and a Razorbill or two was diving off the coast. We kept inshore and eastwards, skirting the land towards Ross Carbery, and getting a few pictures on the way. Nothing much happened till we had passed the ruined tower of the Bishops of Ross and were turning round the head towards the little jetty. Then in front and all across the bay were Shags—a fleet of them fifty strong, and on the rocks many, many more. We were among them unnoticed where they had pulled out to the low ledges to sun themselves and digest, hanging their wings out to dry and sitting

motionless in rows. What a scene it was when we bore down on them, and for a moment or two air and water were filled with the rush of them. I had used my last plate and was free to watch them as they hurled themselves from their perches—old birds almost black save for the bright skin at the gape and the yellow of the beak, and the bronze-green gloss on the plumage, youngsters dusky brown above with throats and breasts varying from dingy white to fawn and mouse-colour—and all alike scurrying to get out to open water, diving under us, rising almost within reach, plunging again, and then swimming off with only their necks showing. When at his leisure and fishing, the Shag dives with a clean spring, wings and tail and feet appearing for a moment clear above the surface. In a hurry, he just scutters under anyhow, never, so far as I could see, using his wings, but working convulsively with his huge flattened webs, and swirling down with a wriggle of his whole body. In less than a minute the entire company had got clear of the bay and was moving rapidly in a bunch to the projecting rocks to the east opposite the strand in front of Castle Freke, a place already well filled, where the new-comers crowded every available foothold.

We landed at the steps, and at once the concourse was explained. Looking down into the clear and shallow water we saw the sea alive with tiny shapes. The whitebait were in. Legions patrolled the length of the jetty, thronged and eddied and swung and split up into battalions as the current caught and steered them. And below and behind were longer, darker shapes, the sand-eels flying likewise from the terrors of the deep. And we knew that outside were the mackerel, hounding on their prey to the shallows; and guessed that the pursuers were themselves pursued, and that far away sea-fowl and dog-fish, porpoise and killer were

moving on the trail. That afternoon while we built a noble fortress on the sands, and saw its lawns and battlements swept away by the rising waves, Andy scoured the bay with lines out, and hauled in the catch as fast as he could get his victims off the hooks. The children caught their first on the way home, and we breakfasted on the best fish (if he be fresh) in the seas. The autumn harvest had come.

Next day the afternoon was pledged to friends. But in the morning we made amends for the dearth of plates and toured the coast for Shags. Where before there had been a fleet, now there was an armada. The outlying reefs were black with birds, and skeins of them stretched over the water. The sea was flat calm, a mirror of opal glass where the long snake-necks swam double, clear and sharp in the brilliant sunshine—a perfect autumn morning. We cruised off the rocks backwards and forwards past birds too lazy and replete to move at our coming, and among flocks that hardly dived till we were ten yards away; and took our fill of pictures, and then shut up the camera and turned, like them, to our fishing. And all the while fresh fowl came pouring in. On the way out we had seen almost nothing except Shags and Gulls. Returning we found the sea marked with lines of Guillemots and Razorbills, and here and there a Puffin. We were late and could not come near them; but at least they were there, and to-morrow we would track them down.

Friday was again a day of perfect weather—bright sun and an easterly wind strong enough to ruffle the water and give us an occasional splash of spray in the bows. But the light was perfect; and for snapshots that is what matters most. I had left my reflex at home; its bulk is a disadvantage: and my new camera was so entirely reliable that its lesser speed and the difficulty of focussing could not

weigh against it. In fact even with a reflex absolute accuracy of definition from a moving boat on moving birds is more or less unattainable. I found that to focus at twelve yards and stop down to F/11 gave me a good exposure even at $1/250$ of a second, and on the whole covered the useful ranges. We were to picnic at Ownahinchy, the stretch of sandy coast between Ross and Galley Head, and were to meet the rest of the party who came by road. There was plenty of time to pursue the birds on the way.

Their number had notably increased. After passing Tralong the sea was dotted with birds—Razorbills and Guillemots in about equal numbers, mostly in pairs, a youngster and its parent in attendance. Their plumage was interesting. A fortnight before all the old birds were still in breeding dress; all the babies very white and fluffy. Now they were more alike. Some few of the adults were still dark-headed; but many were in full winter dress and nearly all had the throat and cheeks heavily spotted with white. And the young were darker, only to be distinguished by the less formed bills and the more juvenile outlines. And they had developed in skill. When we first saw them—on our day at High Island—the new generation had not learnt to dive. If hard pressed they would squatter along the surface or just below it, part submerged but clumsy and helpless. Now they had mastered the art—not the perfect and instantaneous combination of movements by which the expert ducks the head, drives upwards with the feet, spreads the wings and disappears all in a flash, but enough to make a clean hole in the water and vanish with hardly a trace. Many of them did so before we were abreast of them; and to wait for their reappearance was useless, for they would stay under a full half-minute, and even if we went dead slow emerge again

thirty or more yards away. But many were almost fearless, and though thirty feet is too far for a worthy picture, we could get them at that range. I took two pairs of each species and could have taken more, but mindful of past errors decided to husband my plates.

And it was well that I did so. The Shags were not so much in evidence, though the reef held a goodly company. But the sand teemed with Gulls. Save on one memorable day in September, when I visited the beach at Ainsdale at the high tide, and found it white with them, I have not seen more; and not even then was there such variety. Resting on the dry were the larger species—Herring Gulls in hundreds, most of them with the head and neck already streaked with grey; four or five adult Great Black-backs and many more in various phases of adolescence—a three-year-old with mantle of rusty black, black bar on the tail and black spot on the angle of the lower mandible, and yearlings like paler editions of the juvenile Herring Gull, and with the same whistling whine as they supplicate their parents for food; one or two Lesser Black-backs, curiously scarce along this coast where none (I think) can breed; and with them, to my joy, the first lot of Common Gulls that I had noticed in the neighbourhood. Why is it that the Common Gull—horrid misnomer—always seems a bird of finer clay than its congeners, more shapely and distinguished-looking? We all have our preferences, purely fanciful no doubt; but whereas the Great Black-back is to me something of an impostor, a tyrant, but cruel and supercilious and, I suspect, something of a coward, and the Lesser a brigand and a criminal, albeit I love him for his clean courage, and the Herring Gull a vulgarian, a noisy, hulking hooligan of the sea, and the Black-head a Cockney gutter-snipe, pert and inquisitive and shrill and insatiably

hungry, the Common Gull is a gentleman of refinement, dapper and a little aloof, but clean-cut and delicately proportioned and, relatively, well-behaved and self-controlled. At any rate there they were, the broad white tips to the black primaries distinguishing them at once, even where their size did not betray them.

On the water's edge were myriads of Black-heads swimming as near the sand as possible, rising in a cloud when each wave broke, settling at once behind its crest with necks erect and faces shoreward, ready to pounce upon the fry which should be drawn back to them by the under-tow. The picture carried me back to a winter morning at Carrickmines when I had watched a host of them following the plough; for there too they had risen with exactly the same regularity as the team bore down upon them and dropped, when the share had passed, to plunder the newly-turned furrow. Further up the coast, where the rock abuts on the sandhills, such Herring Gulls as had not yet breakfasted to repletion were feasting in their own way. No whitebait for them. They preferred to float just clear of the under-cliff, where the tide ebbed through gullies and clefts and over forests of weed, bringing with it starfish and urchins for them to seize and quarrel over. And when we landed, a last joy was waiting. On a spit of sand by themselves were a flock of dozing Kittiwakes, their short dark legs and the black-ringed necks and dark tertiary coverts of the young birds recognisable at a glance. The Kittiwake is almost half a Tern. Even in the air its flight is lighter and more Tern-like than that of the Gulls. And sitting on the flat or running with little pattering steps they have the Tern's horizontal carriage and gait. I have already rhapsodised enough about the Common Gull; but all Gulls are plebeian to the Kitties; and to find them here, conde-

scending for once to leave the cliffs and the open sea and to behave like mere shore-birds, was a joyous and wonderful surprise. The sight of them revived an illusion of my childhood. When I was a boy of twelve, with a wholly inadequate bird book and the sands of Dee as my hunting-ground, my earliest quarry was a Black-head in first plumage—an August bird washed up but not too dishevelled or decomposed. Nowadays I can smile at the terrors of identifying the unknown. Then my book's brief notes on immature birds convinced me that my treasure was a young Kittiwake. Convinced me—no, not quite; the feet were brown; yet the hind toe seemed all wrong: but at least set me searching among the Gulls of the estuary for evidence that Kittiwakes were among them. In fact until I went to Ireland's Eye I had probably not seen the species at all. Certainly I very soon gave up hope of finding it on the Dee; and never till Ownahinchy did I note them resting on the sand. It was nice to find that they gave me the prettiest photograph I have had for many a day.

A week later, on September 3rd, I had a further opportunity; for the day was a flat calm. Having never yet been sea-sick and being unwilling to lose one of my few illusions about myself, I had hitherto made no motion to accompany Mr. Travers when he went out bottom-fishing. By common consent it is no game for the squeamish; and to go out and then be unwell would have been ungracious. However, on a morning when the sea was a sheet of opalescent glass no one could be uneasy; and I really have a very well-controlled inside.

The fish had been in the bay for some days. Two nights before we had seen a seal just off our rectory, and that morning as we left the bait were jumping in the shallows to the immense delight of the ever-greedy Black-heads.

And for the first time there were Razorbills as far up as Kilfinnen—birds so gorged with food that they would hardly dive when we ran them down. Under the booms were a gathering of Cormorants—the Shag is much the commoner bird on the coast, but he hardly comes into the inlets, which his big cousin prefers to the open sea. The Terns were still hovering over Eve; one or two pairs had big young not yet flying. And outside, off Adam, the larger and outer islet of the bay, a real delight awaited us. We were turning to the westward when I spotted a small Auk on the water to our left. Some days before I had seen what I was confident was a Black Guillemot. And this was unmistakably the same. We went about, and got near enough to turn suspicion into certainty. He was very grey on head and back, a uniform speckling of white on all the black of his plumage; but his wings had the tell-tale patch of white, and his size was smaller than any young Common Guillemot. He dived at long range for the camera: we circled round, and eventually made an exposure. And while doing so, as we were on the look-out for him, a brown form with outspread wings rose up buoyantly through the clear water, and behold within six feet of the boat a Puffin. He had shed the base of his bill and the queer ornaments of his eyes, and his face was heavily shaded with grey. But he was the same dear serio-comic person I had last seen at close quarters in Anglesey.

We dropped the family, except Mary, who has a passion for fishing and a reliable digestion, at Rabbit Island, and as we stopped looked over and saw the water literally seething with sand-eels. No wonder the Auk tribe were in evidence when their favourite food was swarming in the shallows. Then we set off to the Pollock Rock, two miles out to sea. When we cleared the isle, and turned our

bows due south, the surface was alive with birds. Guillemots and Razorbills were there in plenty, mostly in couples or groups of three or four; and among them were a few solitary Puffins, one a youngster, looking very brown, but with dusky cheeks and a beak not unlike a Razorbill's. The gregarious habit, so marked in the breeding season, does not seem to be continued when once the cliffs are deserted. In most cases all the species were fearless and silent; but once or twice a young Razorbill following its parent would keep up a plaintive whistling, answered at intervals by a short gruff growl of unmistakable boredom. "Don't come bothering me: you're big enough to fend for yourself," seemed to be the attitude of the elders; and many of the young had taken the hint and were evidently on their own.

Suddenly a bird passed that I had not seen that season—a bird, and then a little party, and then a big flock, and then a succession of bunches—Manx Shearwaters moving westward, and moving at full speed. The flight of the Shearwater, when he holds his wings rigid and tilts from the horizontal, now to the left, now to the right, as he follows the rise and fall of the swell, skimming the water with effortless mastery, is perhaps the most perfect accomplishment of any winged creature. Even the Swift at play on a summer evening is not more supreme an artist; for he has the whole air to exercise in, and can choose level and direction as he will. To follow the curves of a wind-swept sea, keeping what seems a uniform distance from it, almost shearing the crests but never in fact being touched by them, and to do so at the impulse of a few occasional wing-beats, all too few to explain the speed of the long intervening glides, is when first one sees it a revelation. But now the birds were neither feeding nor out for gymnastics. They flew low—

there were no waves to break the level—half a dozen beats, and then a glide of about the same length, repeated continuously; and the pace was amazing. They were, I suppose, changing their ground; and skeins of them were in sight most of the day.

And after them a big white bird on the water, a Gannet, and the first of many. We tried to get close, but he was shy, and long before we got within camera range was beating heavily along the surface in his effort to get into his proper element. It is when he rises that he reveals almost the sole suggestion of his relationship to the Cormorant; and the contrast between the labour of getting under weigh and the buoyancy of his course is very notable. We saw two or three more swimming, and then a group of five flying steadily westward; and then many more. Indeed when we anchored and got the lines out there was a steady succession of them passing us. Looking eastward we would see a long streak of white upon the sea, like a line of distant breakers: it approached rapidly and resolved itself into thirty or forty Gannets moving with long and powerful strokes steadily across our front, very near to the water, but rising a few yards—enough to clear the horizon—when they saw us abreast their path. They too, like the Shearwaters, had news of doings in the west—though single birds were round us swimming and circling all day.

We anchored, and one more delight remained. A small dark bird, like a long-winged and more powerful Swallow, darted past us, swung round, and beat away and out to sea. I had never seen the Stormy Petrel before; and though this one gave us only a glimpse, its size and action were unmistakable. Nothing that we could have seen was more welcome or more amazing: Gannets, Shags and Gulls—so large, so strong, so capable; Shearwaters, lords

of the air, Auks, masters of the water ; but this waif, so tiny, so seeming helpless, flitting restlessly through the vast and unfriendly spaces of ocean, how gallant and how lonely ! No wonder that its little battered body gets carried far ashore in the hurricanes of winter. The wonder surely is that in a gale the whole tribe is not blown off the globe altogether.

Bottom-fishing to the inexperienced has its own peculiar charm, for it introduces you not only to a new world of light and colour, but to unknown creatures of curious form and unearthly loveliness of hue. Look at a pollock on a fishmonger's slab, and he is a common, dark, ugly brute : pull him out of the water, and no Corinthian bronze was ever more beautiful than his back, no electrum more skillfully blended than the change from gold to silver on his flanks. The whiting, as the townsman knows him, is a fish of insipid complexion and still more insipid taste, fit only for the first breakfast of a convalescent child : as he leaves his rock there is the glory of shining sands and shining spray in his scales. The gurnard, faded and flabby, is merely hideous, a great mouth and huge frills of spines ; fresh caught he is encased in mail of richest bravery, his back of bronze studded with patterning of aquamarines, his sides iridescent with the pink tints of tarnished copper, his shape suggesting taut muscle and slim strength. The ling, our first catch, is, I admit, a creature for which I can raise no enthusiasm ; alike in shape and colour he is unpleasant. But for compensation soon after we had what Irish fishers call a cuckoo, a wonder of ruddy gold set off by two dark spots on the dorsal fin—a fish that made the gold fish of commerce or even of China look lustreless and artificial. And after that a huge mackerel ; and no artist in enamels and mother-of-pearl has ever produced a decor-

ation to compare with the miracle of his sapphire and emerald, nacre and silver. And always there is the fisherman's hope of sport and the naturalist's joy in satisfied curiosity; and when there are birds in plenty, and the mist gives way to the sun, and to landward stretches the whole coast from Cape Clear to Galley Head, he must be hard to please who is not satisfied.

At midday a breeze got up from the south-west, enough to ripple the water, and in an hour or two to sweep the sky clean. We moved nearer inshore to a place famous for its whiting; and no sooner had hauled in the first catch than a solitary Kittiwake came lightly down to inspect us. She had her fill of scraps of bait, dropping daintily upon the morsels and plunging head and shoulders after them as they sank. And in a few minutes came her youngster. He was a sheer joy—utterly fearless, hovering a yard or two from our stern, almost taking food from our hands. As he hung there, with his gentle expression, spotless purity of white and grey and black plumage, and soft cooing note, he was exactly the Saint Esprit of sacred art: one expected to see an olive-branch in his wee black beak. When a young Herring Gull, a hulking great monster who swallowed the relics of a whole mackerel, head and tail and backbone, at a gulp, descended upon us, I was more sure than ever that the Kittiwake was no kinsman of his tribe. Alas, I had only brought out half a dozen plates, and, with Black Guillemot, Shearwater and Gannet all new to me, had used them all long ago. But when the youngster sat placidly on the water six feet away, and still more when a second arrived and they “had words” in the air in a fashion far from saintly, I registered a resolve that somewhere, somewhen, I would go a-fishing again with a cargo of scraps aboard and plates enough to make studies of all the Gull tribe from the boat.

I hereby commend it as a method to any enterprising bird-photographer. For I can testify that birds which would never come within range of the landsman and fly from a moving boat are utterly indifferent when their human companions are following a trade which they understand.

Before we had done the sun had come out and the sea had changed from beauty to beauty. Steel-blue on the horizon and the true ultramarine to the eastward, inshore it was a blend of willow-green in the shadows and cobalt where it caught the light. And the land, grey cliffs, heather and gorse-clad slopes, jewelled with patches of emerald pasture and golden corn-field, and behind, rich and varied woods, set against dim blue hills far away—"There's no coast like it," said my host: "they talk about the tropics and the coral islands and the beauty of the Southern seas. I've seen them; and for sheer colour and variety, for everything except their palm trees, they can't touch this old country." And being wholly ignorant of the reality, and familiar with the beglamoured writings of the Conrad school, I nevertheless believed him. If there is colour, outside paradise, more wonderful than what we saw that day, my imagination cannot compass the likeness of it.

At last the remembrance of my family, waiting to be collected after tea, bade us haul up the anchor-stone and return. As we crossed the Castle Haven bay Gannets were soaring and plunging around us; Razorbills were floating on the water; and as we passed the reefs of Low Island a huge flock of Curlew crossed our bows from the mainland to search the weed-clad rocks uncovered by the ebb. And off Glandore as we came to our moorings the whitebait were still jumping in the ripples, and the Black-heads were still feeding; and the seal looked up to say good-night. And nothing would satisfy Mary but to manœuvre me into

the punt, to catch a breakfast of mackerel before we turned in.

A few days later when our visit ended we found evidence of the same movement of fish and birds. All the waters of Cork Harbour seethed with mackerel; from every jetty in Monkstown rows of children were hauling them out on improvised rod and line: and Gulls were everywhere—Black-heads and Commons and Herrings and Great Black-backs. But none followed the boat: they were too busy and too well fed. And in the open sea was nothing except Gannets and Kittiwakes (among them an Arctic Skua or two), an occasional Shearwater, and a great school of dolphins bounding clear of the water from nose-tip to tail as they raced across our path.

Those days when the fish came on to the coast, and the predatory hosts of sea-birds gathered to the feast, gave me a new experience, and one not lightly to be forgotten. Hitherto to me, as to most landsmen, the Gulls alone had been really familiar. The rest appear, one knows not whence, at their breeding stations, and for three months are associated with wave-washed precipices and a few not too accessible islets. For the rest of the year they are represented only by the storm-driven waifs of the foreshore or the casual victims of the oil; or at most by an occasional glimpse of a bird or two on the sea from the deck of a ship. Here they were, pursuing the business of their lives, following their food, and winning it the more easily when the autumn shoaling of the fry sets all the sea-folk moving. One guessed something of the hidden life of the deep, of the migration of Shags and Auks which no man yet has mapped, and of the secret forces which determine their travels and distribution. Have they like other migrants a fixed routine and an approximately constant itinerary?

Does the whole stock of Puffins, for example, join forces and move to definite areas? Or do they disperse more or less at haphazard and get lost to our view in the vast solitudes of the ocean? Or do some of them haunt fixed spots, while others form flying squadrons to follow the fish? Plainly in those days off County Cork far more than the local race of Shags were quartered upon us. Plainly Razorbills and Guillemots had come and would depart. Shall we some day begin to understand as much about their movements as we now do about the migration of their kindred of the land—little enough though that may be? And if so shall we see a great and complex eddy of life repeated year by year with something approaching regularity? To link up the variation of temperature and air-currents with the activities of the fish on which they feed, and to relate these with the seasonal impulse to return to a particular islet and there rear a new generation; to be able to show how any one bird spends its year, how far and within what definite limits its activities are stereotyped, and to what extent its survival depends upon and fosters its own powers of adventure and initiative; and so to get a glimpse of the psychology of it all, to trace the measure of communal and individual consciousness, and to learn how much is blind instinct, controlled by forces of which the creature is wholly unconscious and standardised by continual repetition into mere behaviour, and how much room is left for the assertion of particular character and the purposive control of events, for nurture and training and observation and conscious adjustment to circumstances; these are the kind of questionings which such an experience arouses. Happy, in his humble sphere, the man who can bring us nearer to an answer.

And behind such problems lie still more difficult subjects for the student. We have not yet explained satisfactorily

how the land-birds steer their course on migration ; but he would be a bold man who denied that coast-lines, rivers and islands familiar to them or perhaps to their tribe gave them bearings for their journeys. Homing pigeons evidently depend on eyesight for their route, and learn it stage by stage ; and if, as many authorities assume, the travellers move at great heights, much of their way will lie open as on a map below them. Such theories may perhaps be made to cover the movements of our ordinary migrants. They hardly offer a clue to the process by which the sea-fowl find the path back from the open ocean to the rocks on which they were born. In late December, when I was three days out from New York on my homeward voyage, off the Newfoundland banks for forty-eight hours we were accompanied by vast flocks of Kittiwakes. Companies of them circled round our stern ; hundreds were in sight on our port side ; drifts of birds kept sweeping across our track. No doubt my friends of the Irish coast were among them : no doubt in April they would return to Puffin Island or Ireland's Eye. What compass guides them over a thousand miles of featureless water ? What sensibility draws them to the cliffs of their home ? It is a sufficient miracle to one on the high seas that man with his mastery of mechanism can make his port with certainty. Yet year after year the same Guillemots lay their eggs on the same ledges, and the same Puffins return to the same burrows for their breeding. Certainly such birds steer by other senses than sight. Certainly they have a faculty of orientation very different from our own. To get behind vague talk of instinct or of a sixth sense, and speculations on racial memory or sensitiveness to earth's magnetism, may be as yet impossible ; but there is a field here for the comparative psychologist and the bio-physicist well worthy of research.

CHAPTER IV

BIRDING AT BANGOR

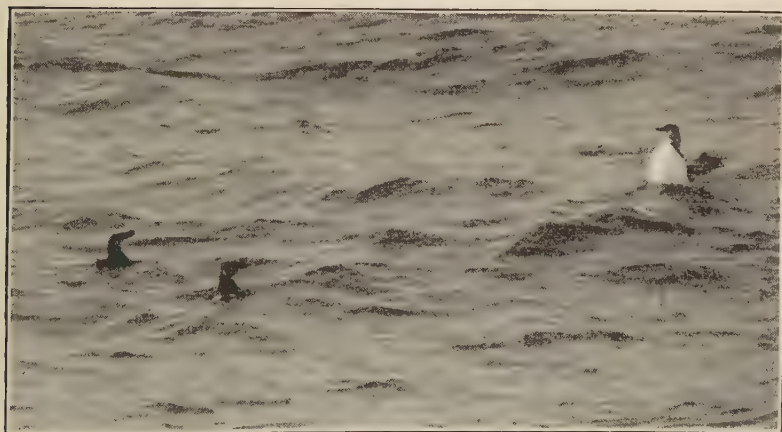
SNOW lay upon the Carnedds as I climbed the hill to University College at Bangor on March 28th, 1927, to lecture to the School of Theology, but the sun was setting gloriously and the rainy spell seemed at an end. Next day, when the afternoon saw me free for birds, the mist lay heavy to the eastward, and with some reluctance we substituted Holyhead for Snowdonia as our objective—reluctance because it seemed early for sea-birds, and the Nantfrancon pass draws me more surely than any other spot in the Principality.

It was a fortunate choice. In Anglesey the weather cleared and gave us almost perfect conditions, and both the birds and their home vastly exceeded my expectation.

The island itself is full of charm. When years before I had seen it from the Irish mail, the whole lie of the land had testified to bird-life. Such noble inlets now to the south, now to the north of the line, such stretches of bog and heath, such sheltered valleys and coppices must house multitudes of sea-fowl and snipe, finches and warblers. And Mr. Coward had told me something of treasures far more precious. As we drove across it, though there was little except Lapwings and Jackdaws, the impression of its excellence deepened. Here was a hunting-ground some day to be explored. And as we swung through the dingy streets of Holyhead and round the terraced limestone of



SHAGS



RAZORBILLS AND GUILLEMOT



CURLEW ON NEST



BLACK-NECKED GREBE'S NEST

the mountain, a coast almost startling in its grandeur opened up before us. Seen from the sea the cliffs look fine but hardly majestic: now as we stood on their summit with the lighthouse far below, their scale and character were singularly impressive. Round them flew Herring Gulls in number, prospecting for ledges on which they could secure a nesting site. On the water was a cluster of Guillemots, and past us flapped a pair of Ravens to settle on a nose of rock and stalk sedately from it through the ling and furze, seeking for the slugs and worms on which their brood should be reared.

It was when we had crossed the southern headland and found a picnic place on the edge of the precipice between the two Stacks that the bird-life became fascinating in its variety. On the broken talus beneath us Herring Gulls were settled in pairs, keeping guard over their territory and enjoying one another's society. Others were looking for homes; and both in the air and on the rocks fighting was frequent and fierce. The island to the north was heavily spotted with birds: new-comers would get a poor welcome on its crowded summit, and must take their chance of establishing themselves on the few broader ledges of the mainland cliff. No doubt as their numbers increase they will be forced on to the heather banks of the mountain. The sheer face had already serried ranks of Guillemots on its narrow shelves, and higher up a group of Razorbills had taken possession. That they should have come ashore before the end of March was to me something of a surprise. But much more unexpected was the discovery of a little colony of Cormorants already sitting on their big nests of dead gorse-stems on the pinnacles at the top of the precipice. Perhaps a dozen pairs were huddled together on the three small and quite inaccessible platforms, great birds full-

crested and brilliantly marked with white at gape and flanks, their necks frosted with bridal veils of down. To and fro they came from the sea, beating up rapidly to their posts and alighting with a throaty chuckle of greeting like a coarse laugh. There they stand, statues of an oily bronze, motionless save for twistings of the neck and bowings of the head. They are curiously inactive: courtship seems to be over; they are bringing neither material for the nests nor food for their mates; only paying them constant visits with the solicitude of early married life. Seen so they are almost handsome, their plumage bright and clear, their poise alert and dignified, vastly different from the dingy, malicious, repulsive brutes that they become when they doff the short-lived ornaments of their nuptials. And the site they have chosen is a fine one. Perched up sheer above the abyss, gazing out to the sea, the "royal Cormorant" does not look quite unworthy of his title.

But for real royalty his claims that afternoon were speedily displaced. Over the silhouette of the headland floated a couple of great black shapes, turning with easy flaps of the broad and ragged wings. The North Stack like the South had its Ravens. And hardly were they out of sight when shooting from the cliff and racing seaward with swift and flashing wings came the steel-blue shape and clean outline of a Peregrine. Up he rises high above the island, circling round with pinions "strained to a bow," sailing towards us, stooping to a rock on the cliff, alighting to gaze at the intruders, and incidentally giving us a wonderful view of yellow legs and tawny dark-barred breast. And more was to follow. For on his next appearance when he came sailing above us the Falcon joined him, her size very noticeably superior and her outline, seen from

below, differing slightly in shape and proportion of parts. For a few moments the Herring Gulls give up their quarrellings for eligible building sites to mob her as she passed : how slow and clumsy she made them look as she dashed through and above, banked and climbed and circled, with the whole pack of them toiling heavily below her. It was long since I had seen the true overlord of British birds, and then they had been glimpses only ; and that half-hour under Holyhead mountain set me a new quest.

My next visit to Anglesey did nothing to advance it, though in other respects my two days were very memorable. On May 5th we left the Mersey, broke our run for an hour on the Denbigh moors, watched a pair of Golden Plover evidently newly arrived, very friendly but not yet nesting, located a hen Curlew and walked her off her eggs, and dropped down through a golden evening to Bangor, and a long yarn with Professor Orton about the birds of Snowdon and the Isle.

Next day we spent full twelve hours in the open air, visiting first a colony of sea-birds and then an inland lake. It was a day of glorious heat ; a gleaming mist clothed the mountains and the whole air was liquid gold. We missed the distant views, but had ample compensation in the mystery of that luminous haze and the brilliance of the foreground colour. And our expedition was full of delights. To the cliffs we went by car, and then by a long tramp round little inlets and secluded bays. Quite uselessly I carried my tent, more lest I should regret the lack of it than from any conviction that time would allow it to be set up ; and an hour of its company was quite enough. At last, after many glimpses of Oystercatchers and Herring Gulls, we got to our headland, and suddenly were in a paradise of birds. Why is it that when a stretch of coast

seems all equally suitable, some one spot will be chosen and crowded to overflowing? Here on a small and broken area of low cliff were Herring Gulls in hundreds, almost in thousands, a few Lesser Black-backs—it was too early for the main body, and only three days before I had seen numbers of them busy over Windermere—many pairs of Greater Black-backs, a little group of Shags nesting on open ledges, a big colony of Cormorants, and a Raven's nest. The young Ravens had just left. One, I hope and believe, had got aloft on to the hill; the other was squatting miserably on a steep ledge, and as we watched was furiously attacked by the Gulls. Poor little chap, he was hopelessly outweighed as his cruel neighbours swooped at him. He was barely able to fly: the ground offered no cover; and when finally he was seized by the wing and dragged from his perch, it seemed as if his fate was sealed. He shook himself clear, made a few beats of his wings, and, I hope, found refuge lower down the cliff. At least we saw no signs of him on the water. But his chance of escape was, I'm afraid, a poor one.

By dint of stalking I managed to get within twelve feet of a sitting Cormorant, the one bird which refused to leave her eggs; and after taking her inspected the nests. Most of them had four eggs, two had clutches of five; and they were placed side by side, as close as their bulk would allow. Near them were four Greater Black-backs' nests, each with clutches of three; and I was told that in the previous season some fifty pairs had settled here. Had we had a whole day, I should have tried to "tent" the big birds; but their eggs were fresh, and they were much less careless of us than the Herring Gulls. It would have been a long business, and probably futile. The Shags I could only see by squatting over the edge of a neighbouring

cliff and looking down; for their nests were in a cleft or chasm of the rock.

After lunch we set off in the car for our lake, a fine sheet of water hidden away "somewhere in North Wales." I had heard rumours that the Black-necked Grebe had been resident for some twenty years in the Principality, but having always the feeling that it is better not to inquire about localities of which if asked one will have to tell lies, I had but the vaguest idea of the favoured spot. It was with no notion of what lay before me that at last we reached our destination; nor until I saw the bird with my own eyes could I believe that we were in its haunt: indeed I was secretly lamenting the brevity of my visit to the cliffs and the failure to try conclusions with the Black-backs.

It was only a glimpse that changed my regrets into excitement—a glimpse of a bird that was clearly not a Dabchick, a bird larger and much blacker-looking, with bill aggressively tilted and lacking the conspicuous blue-white patch at the gape, a bird that I had seen once in October and in its winter plumage on the Orwell below Ipswich and had tried to photograph from a boat. She dived at once, but further inspection made her identity sure, and by following up her direction I was able to discover her nest, a mass of green and floating weed, small on the surface but broad-based below, set in a dense growth of flowering bog-bean and ready for eggs. The finding of it was an astonishing piece of luck; for the lake was large and full of great stretches of reeds and water-plants, which would make the shallow plate every day more invisible. It was, I suppose, the rarest nest that I have ever seen in Britain. Fortunately it is well protected both by the owner of the adjacent estate and by its situation, and it seems probable that the birds are securely established.

Next day saw the fulfilment of the main purpose of my visit. Ever since my holiday in County Cork I had longed for closer acquaintance with the Chough; and at Bangor I had heard that my hopes might possibly be fulfilled. There were a certain number of them nesting within a distance not too great for a car, and an old site had been occupied in the previous season. Of the adventures by which we reached it, as of the direction of our journey, I must say nothing: Choughs, like Ravens, have their market value. But when at last we got to the place and saw no signs of them, and were told that their usual crevice had been destroyed by a fall of rock, it was a sad disappointment. It seemed evident that they had gone: beyond a last year's perching-place there was nothing; and they are noisy birds, quick to proclaim the presence of an intruder. Nevertheless atop the cliff we lay down to get our breath and wait; and in a few minutes there came over from an escarpment to the right a black bird with unmistakable beak. He flew to the spot where we had expected him, dived sheer down as a Raven dives, and doing so called; and the Chough's call once heard has about it a metallic, almost a musical, quality unlike any other British bird. In a moment he reappeared with his mate, making off to their usual feeding-grounds. When she returned it was easy to renew our search, and not difficult to see her nest, a large mass of roots and twigs set deep in a square hollow in a boulder.

To climb to it was a risky business; for all the rock was rotten and liable to fall; to get a picture in the dark of the cranny was hardly possible; but to lie up on a flat stone below it and to be buried in tarpaulin and ground-sheet holding the camera focussed on the site was comparatively easy. And the birds were delightfully tame.

My companions had hardly departed when the pair came back, calling loudly and not seriously bothered by the queer tumble of mackintosh deposited beneath them. In the next half-hour they gave me plenty of opportunities and I exposed plates lavishly; but the light was bad; black birds against dark rock in deep shade are at best poor subjects: the range was too great even for my long-focus lens, and the position was too unstable for an adequate exposure. The results were a poor lot; but I do not see how under the circumstances they could have been bettered. Anyhow, to watch such delightful creatures at close quarters, to listen to their laughter, and see the hen finally ensconced upon her eggs was to spend a morning of sheer joy. Two such days sent me back to a busy Sunday bursting with health and happiness; and despite four sermons the plates were all safely developed before bed-time.

CHAPTER V

LIVERPOOL'S PARADISE

IT was not long before my acquaintance with the Chough was renewed, though, alas, hardly extended. On 18th May I followed the annual migration route of my fellow-townsmen and embarked for Douglas. In Holland two years before, Colonel Madoc had fired me with a desire to visit the Isle of Man; and at last the trip was undertaken; Chough, Peregrine, Raven and Black Guillemot being the birds of which I was dreaming.

The weather was glorious and the Mersey full of Gulls, mostly youngsters in various phases of immaturity, and where not juvenile usually Lesser Black-backs. A Black-head with a complete mask but with the brown wing-bar and black-tipped tail of youth was the most interesting of them; but some of the Black-backs were fine examples of the development of plumage. On the way over our escort were both Black-backs and Herrings: even when seen from below and against the sun the two are easily distinguishable; the Herring a shade larger all over, his wings more broadly tipped with white, his feet flesh-colour, not yellow, and his movements notably more clumsy. Apart from Gulls a few Razorbills and Guillemots inside the Liverpool light-ships and again off the Manx coast were all that I could see.

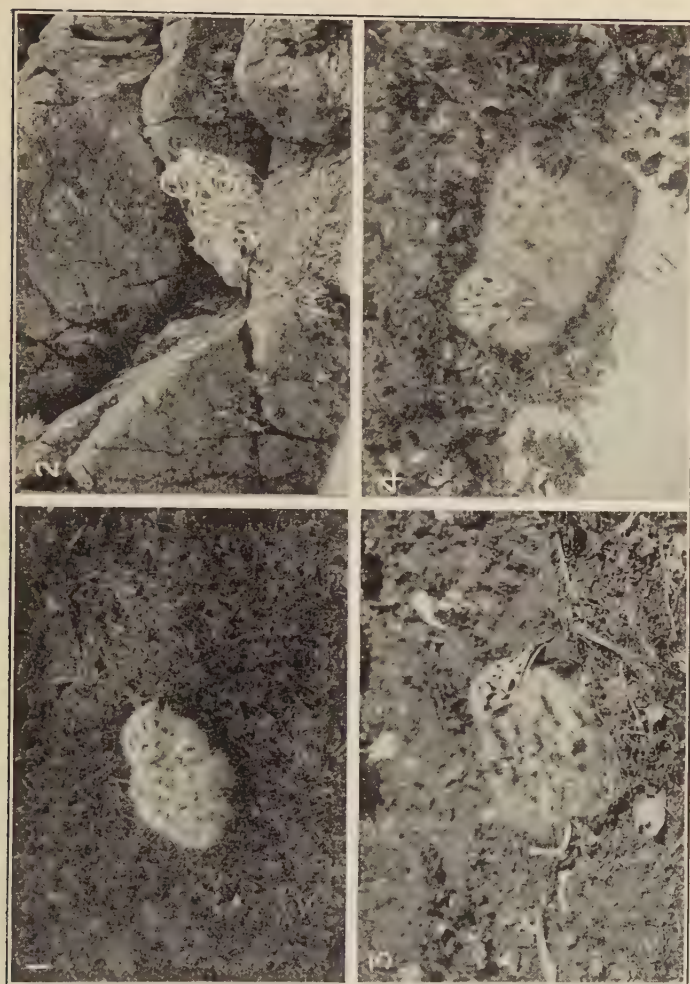
There is always a peculiar fascination about visiting for the first time a place about which one has formed mental

pictures. My first visit to America had warned me of the limitations of my imagination: the reality had been utterly unlike the queer composite caricature that had done duty for it. How do we get these strange pictures that rise in our minds when a country or a celebrity is mentioned? Everyone must have them: probably few could analyse out the elements from which they are derived. To the Isle of Man my first reactions had been eminently unfavourable: I suspect on account of an irrational prejudice against its most famous novelist. Then Brown's poems had reversed the verdict, so far as my conscious self was concerned; yet even his passion for his native land and my affection for his quality did not wholly cure the jaundice of my outlook. Thereafter visions of the Lancashire trippers' paradise struggled with stories of sea-birds and coast scenery to create a highly complex attitude. If only the island had been allowed to make its own impression it would have captivated me at once: as it was, I came critical; yet even so the sheer beauty and variety of it prevailed. Cliffs as fine as the Stack, glens as fair as the Lynn, gorse as orange as at Glendalough, blue-bells reminding me of Ireland's Eye, hills as bare as Arenig, marshes like Quy Fen or Chippenham—here was a land where the joys of many summers met and were repeated.

And the birds! Down the glen, a fairy land of ferns and moss, with a tiny stream rippling in cascades through the chequer-work of shadow and sunshine to a sea of smooth turquoise set between cliffs clothed in greenery and rising to headlands of stark rock, was half a mile of beauty. And as we left it for the hill-side three Cuckoos and a pair of Hooded Crows rose at our feet. The Hoodies had just left their nesting: the eggs had been still unhatched on May 1st: now the nest built in the ivy on the face of a

steep gully and lined with wool was deserted, and the young were hopping about the trees, and rapidly losing the look of fluffy innocence which is the heritage even of the most criminal of birds. In the scrub of heather and gorse and bracken and brambles Meadow Pipits and Linnets were swarming—which no doubt accounted for the Cuckoos. But here as elsewhere in the island the prevailing bird was the Herring Gull. From the sands of the North to the precipices of the south, in the harbours and the ploughlands, the marshes and the mountains, the Herring Gull was hardly ever out of sight. On our headland they were sitting from high-water mark to the top of the cliffs, most of them on small nests tucked away in crevices and tiny ledges. The Lesser Black-backs had hardly yet come in; but a pair of the Greater had their home on a sea-girt reef of rock just below the head. All such birds were of small interest to me, when suddenly I spotted a Black Guillemot winging up from the sea, and going to earth in a wee burrow under a flat rock just at the point where the heathy slope dropped into sheer vertical cliff. There in a scrape little larger than herself lay the bird, crouching prone in what is probably her normal incubating position, her wing-patch gleaming very white and her crimson feet plainly visible. She seemed to have no eggs: when she flew out the hole was empty: probably like the other Auks she broods for days on the nesting site before laying. But during my stay she was usually there in fine weather, returning to the sea when it was cold or overcast. Alas, to photograph her was almost, indeed for me quite, impracticable: she could be studied, and every movement noted, through the glasses; but the lie of the land gave me no stance within a long thirty yards.

This was indeed a very general experience. Birds were



1. GREAT BLACK-
BACKED GULL,
1 day old

2. COMMON GULL

3. LESSER BLACK-
BACKED GULL

4. HERRING GULL



HERRING GULLS



YOUNG PEREGRINES, *about a fortnight old*

numerous, varied and friendly. But the cliffs, even when not precipitous, were so steep as to make a descent without ropes singularly uninviting. I hate climbing down, especially on a grass slope that ends in a drop; and when alone and hampered with a camera discretion has my vote every time. So I worked with a long-focus lens and without enthusiasm, and spent most of my time in observation.

It was, in fact, pure joy, after a succession of hectic days when every available minute was devoted to photography, to have hours of quiet, in company with rare and fascinating species. The charm of it would probably appeal only to the genuine bird-lover: in fact its power might be made a test of the reality of one's passion. To sit all through a morning watching half a dozen pairs of Black Guillemot paddling gently in and out of the little inlet where they would soon be nesting does not sound on the face of it exciting. Perhaps not; but let the would-be naturalist give it a trial. For me at least it had an attraction simply irresistible. There a hundred feet below were the little black shapes with the double triangles of white standing out vividly and the brilliant feet glowing through the water. Now two more would appear, slipping in from the outer sea. Now a pair would indulge in gentle courtship, swimming breast to breast and then revolving slowly, the cock moving round his mate, and each bird gazing at the other. Now a couple would dive, flying in and out of the water, the flash of the coverts showing that the wings were used as vigorously beneath the surface as in the air. Once a lady jumped up to a low rock, scrambled on to it, hopped to a higher perch, lay down and preened herself in the sun. Occasionally a plaintive whistle sounded softly over the sea. That was the extent of their performance—little enough to show for several hours of watching,

but sufficient to make me rank the Tystie high among my list of favourite birds, a gracious, gentle, winsome little person with an air at once homely and distinguished. And such simple joys have a peculiar æsthetic quality: one is not exploiting the bird to one's own advantage; one looks to make nothing out of her; only one enters into and rejoices in her life.

Three days after my arrival I spent a similar morning with a pair of Peregrines on another headland even more inaccessible to the photographer, but admirable for observation. The cliffs here were a full three hundred feet in height, terraced with stretches of green and steps of vertical crag, and at the site of the eyrie divided by a broad cleft or chasm running up into the hill. Here on a grassy ledge not far above the breaking of the waves the Falcon had laid her eggs; and now the three youngsters, apparently about a week old, were lying on the bare soil at the base of a miniature precipice. The place was, in fact, admirably chosen; for a bulge of the rock sheltered the brooding bird from the rain, and when sitting close up against the stone her colour harmonised exactly with it. To climb down would at best have involved very careful prospecting of the route and a long detour; and the lower part of the descent would have been impossible without a companion. I was content to waste a plate or two at an outside range and to look down at her through the glasses. The whole site was open, and every movement was visible.

The morning was stormy with a high wind and the certainty of rain; but at ten o'clock we arrived in a fine interval. The Falcon was on her nest, her face set to the cliff, but lifted towards us: she gave us a grand view of slate-brown back and tail, fierce black moustaches and cheeks of pinkish buff, and of one nestling huddled against

her breast. Soon the Tiercel flashed past at a speed that made the Gulls look almost stationary, and with a clean perfection of movement, a dashing mastery of the air, peculiarly his own. No bird of my acquaintance equals him whether in the rapidity of his course when the swift wings flicker around him, or in the poise of his glide as he gauges the distance to his perch, the rate of his approach, and the pressure and direction of the breeze. He alighted for a moment on the cliff above the eyrie: the Falcon rose from her young, stretched her wings, as a man stretches his arms, flattened and spread them, sprang into the air, and soared circling past the promontory. In a few minutes she returned, settling beside the brood, and after a moment's gaze sinking flat over her charges. And with her came the rain.

For the next hour and a half it poured. She turned her face to the wall, sank her head, hunched her shoulders, sloped down her wings and made a sort of tent of herself. I alternately shivered under a rock that hardly pretended to shelter me, and stamped up and down to keep fingers and feet from freezing. My chief consolation was a family of Stonechats: young birds that had not long left the nest, and a fond father who, in intervals of telling me exactly what he thought of my appearance and character, fed them assiduously or else coquetted with his wife, who was no doubt beginning to contemplate a second brood. But there were innumerable Jackdaws in the cliffs, and a pair of Hoodies who had tucked their nest away under a pent-house of rock. The hen Crow was sitting, probably on newly-hatched chicks, but the cock was assiduous in his attendance, even crawling in under the gable and sharing what looked very cramped quarters with his mate.

Shortly before noon the clouds broke and the rain

stopped, and I could resume my watch on the Falcon. She was still covering her young, and even a flying visit from the Tiercel did not move her. But as soon as a gleam of sun lit up the sea she came off, to return in about ten minutes with prey in her talons. Standing by the eyrie on the patch of soil worn smooth by her visits and bespattered with the excrement of her babies, she proceeded very leisurely to pluck her victim, to devour its head, and then to tear off small pieces and distribute them to the eager mouths that were turned up to her own. Before the process was over, and dinner lasted a quarter of an hour, the cock bird dropped for a moment on to the ledge a foot or two away, revealing himself as noticeably smaller and distinctly more blue-grey. The scene exactly reproduced and vividly recalled to me the mounted group over which I had gloated at the Natural History Museum in my boyhood, when (I blush to confess it) the possession of a Peregrine's egg was the summit of my earthly ambition. If only the cliffs had been less forbidding, if only Peter had been with me, I might have enshrined it in a photograph. Now that I am no longer wet and cold and gazing down into that gruesome gulf with the glamour of the family under my eyes, I feel convinced that I could have got within range—though in saner moments and knowing my weakness I am not surprised that it was not attempted.

When she had finished the meal, she jerked away behind her the relics of the dead, and settled down over the children till they had gone safely to sleep. Then away for air and exercise, for half an hour's freedom. Returning she again stood beside them, saw that all was well, preened her back and wings, scratched her face with her right foot, and finally resumed her position, brooding over the nestlings

and occasionally gazing up at me where I hung over a railing far above.

The desire to try conclusions further with the Peregrines grew upon me during the Sunday, and on Monday, May 23rd, a morning with a Greater Black-back gave me a sort of rehearsal. I had found the nest three days before and watched the hen bird on to her eggs. It was on a ridge of rock, almost an island, at the foot of Clay Head, difficult of access, but possibly to be photographed if one could descend to its level on the mainland. That morning I was early afield, determined to survey the lie of the land and somehow work down to camera-range. In fact it turned out an easy affair, the cliff just opposite the nest being a steep slope of grass and rock. With care, and at one point some moments of acute anxiety, I got down to the spot that I had selected, a good boulder with a tuft of heather at its foot, sufficient to give me a secure seat. While I was climbing the Black-back never left her eggs, and I got her at once exchanging compliments with a swooping Herring Gull. Then my presence annoyed her: she stood up over her nest, and eventually jumped on to the wing, sailing round with hoarse cries not unlike the bark of a Raven. She gave me a wonderful display of aerial gymnastics in her endeavour to clear the sky of all rivals. While hovering over her rock she would suddenly dive head-first at a Gull behind her, turning over in the air and dashing down at an acute angle to her previous course. Then she would soar with wings wide-spread and swoop hawk-like upon another intruder who would turn and twist from her onset. No blows were given; and the Herrings were not slow to retaliate, stooping at her as soon as she returned to her rock. I got my pictures very quickly, and came home more than satisfied that if I could not get

down to the Peregrines, at least I could manage all but the last sheer descent.

Next day the wind was too high for our expedition to the Calf and in the morning I was put in charge of Mr. Collister of the Manx police and sent out to the Peregrine. He was confident that the nest could be reached; and we got down without much difficulty over scree and slope to within twenty yards. Then the trouble began. He went on gaily: I had a camera and stand to carry, and for real climbing knew that I should want both hands. We tried several lines of approach: all were simple enough until the last stage, and then demanded care and strength. Mr. Collister was born on the Isle, had been bred to the sea, knew the cliffs from Spanish Head to Maughold. Finally, by descending nearly to sea-level and working round a long traverse, he got to the ledge, showed me the young birds—large downy creatures running to leg and wing and paunch, and about twelve days old. But to join him with the camera was beyond me; and when he came back he admitted that he could not get down carrying it himself. It was intolerable to be so near and yet to get no picture: what was to be done?

We discussed several plans. And eventually I asked him if he would take the photograph if I set the camera and lowered it to him. A brief lesson in the elements of the art followed. I judged the length of the ledge to be eight feet; and as he could not manage focussing, set the pointer at eight, stopped down to F9, and set the shutter at $\frac{1}{50}$ th. It seemed hopeless to try a shorter range; for at less than eight feet the chance of a sharp picture would be infinitesimal. He could estimate the distance fairly well—and learnt very easily how to point the camera, open and close the dark-slide, release the shutter, reverse the

plate-holder, set the shutter and repeat the process. Fortunately I had my reel of salmon-line in my pocket—line tested to a weight far more than it would now have to carry. We lashed the camera to it, and before starting his climb he lowered it over the first terrace of rock, leaving me squatting on top with the string, and the instrument hanging over the nesting site. Then his detour began, and after what seemed an age a lift of the line warned me that he had arrived. I could see him as he stood for the picture at the tip of the ledge, could remind him of the processes, and curse myself for not being with him—the more heartily because it seemed scarcely possible that the pictures would come out without accident. He took two, handling the camera with confidence and efficiency; managed the ascent safely, and assisted to haul up the line. The plan had been carried out without a hitch; and when he described how the three babies were lying up against the cliff with the wings, head and skeleton of a Grey Crow for bedding, and surrounded with relics of rabbits and small birds, but otherwise on bare earth, I longed to test our luck in a dark-room. Few half-hours have been more thrilling than that which proved that the gallant constable had done his work well; and I am rather more proud of my baby Peregrines than of any picture in my collection. It may not be perfect: eight feet was an over-estimate; but considering that he had never before taken a photograph, and that under such conditions mistakes can be made by the best of us, it was a fine bit of work. Two days later, when I was returning to Liverpool, I got a last look at the site of the eyrie from the sea. Every man has his own private terror, some one thing that stirs up ancient and unreasoning panic: a big vertical drop has always been mine; and looking at that awesome cliff I could hardly

believe that I had ever worked my way from top to bottom of it. The sight helped me to feel that we had deserved our luck and earned our photographs.

During our climb the Falcon had been perched on a turret of cliff some distance away. She had slipped off her nest when we commenced the final descent, and during it had paid us several visits, flying swiftly over the site, and screaming continuously with a shrill, harsh and monotonous cry that drowned the noise of Gulls and Daws and sea. But she had made no attempt to interfere, as my companion had expected; and when we were back on the road she came quietly back and settled again to the care of her brood. After watching her awhile we had a further experience of the Raven; for a pair whose first nest had probably met with disaster had built a new one in a big cliff some half-mile further south. From a rib of rock opposite the place was easily photographed, and when we first saw it two large heads and very pink gapes were thrust up from the cavity. When the old bird discovered our presence she gave warning, and her youngsters (there were four of them) speedily effaced themselves. The ridge from which we watched them was hardly less interesting than the nest; for it was the perching-place of the parents, and was littered with their feathers and large grey pellets, and with sodden tufts of rabbits' fur. On these stony rocks the coney swarms, and supplies the bulk of the diet of the Falcons, Ravens, Hoodies and Gulls.

Next day our expedition to the Calf, already twice postponed, was accomplished—a day never to be forgotten for the glory of sea and rocks and sky, and the bird-life of which they were the setting. We went in a rowing-boat from Port St. Mary so as to pass along the magnificent coast-line of Spanish Head; and for the first time I saw a breeding-place of sea-fowl on a grand scale. The Head

is stratified limestone fretted by the weather into shelves some eighteen inches wide and set tier above tier all up the three hundred feet of the precipice. Great fissures and caves break into the cliff, and in places the rock is twisted and upheaved by volcanic action. Here and there steep slopes of turf compose the bulk of the face, and the Puffin seizes upon them. To row along the foot of such a coast is to see all the British sea-birds at close quarters. Near Port St. Mary a group of Cormorants, mostly brown-backed, white-chested youngsters, sat crowded on a flat and weedy rock. At the beginning of the cliff a Black Guillemot took wing before us. Round the corner were a multitude of Shags outside a cavern which the young had only lately left. And on an outlying boulder sat a party of Razorbills. Then came the main colony—a sheer and terraced precipice whitewashed by years of use where the Guillemots stood row upon row, the whole reminding me of one of those sectional views of a sky-scraper in which the occupants of each storey are depicted in their own flat. We had seen the place some days before from above: from the sea it was far more impressive. The top floors had Herring Gulls and a Raven as their tenants, the Raven's nest tucked well back into a deep shelf. We saw two of the birds, a youngster and its parent, perched on the summit of the cliff. Below were Guillemots—eight or ten tiers packed with growling birds. Nearer the sea were Razorbills, less crowded together, but in many hundreds: the Razorbill is clumsier and less timid than the Guillemot, and many of them let us come almost within oar's length. The Sugarloaf, a conical rock broken off from the mainland, had its southern face alive with birds. The sea at its foot was thick with them. And above our heads a constant stream of swift-winged occupants kept coming and going.

Beyond was a slope honey-combed with burrows, and water dotted with Puffins; and round the next head was a cave whose mouth and walls were plastered with Kittiwakes' nests. It is a huge colony, far larger than that on the Farnes, and the birds were literally side by side. It was noticeable that both here and at the Sugarloaf the western face was the favourite: when we passed just before noon the nests were still in the shade.

Nearer to the Sound we got our first view of Choughs: a few pairs breed here on the mainland, though their stronghold is on the Calf. During the day we saw at least a dozen of them both on the cliffs and in the fields. On the flat rocks opposite the island there were Shelducks, and over the strait a couple of Gannets were fishing. All along the coast Rock Pipits were breeding: we could watch them carrying food to their nests not far above the reach of the waves.

The Calf itself gave us a repetition of the earlier part of our journey—Shags, Guillemots, Razorbills, a few Puffins, and innumerable Gulls. We landed at a break in the cliffs on the south-eastern corner, picnicked in company with a pair of anxious Oystercatchers, and visited the big gullery opposite the Chickens lighthouse. Each sector of the headland had its dominant rock occupied by Greater Black-backs. I found one nest ready for eggs, and another with a clutch of three. Herring Gulls were everywhere—their nests shallow heaps of the roots of sea-pink, usually set in an angle of stone, but often on the open hill, and near them a patch of plucked soil where the materials had been torn up from the turf. In a corner were a few pairs of Lesser Black-backs, occupying a territory of their own among the swarms of Herrings. The nests of whose identification we made sure were certainly larger than the Herring's, more after the pattern of the Greater Black-

back ; and the eggs were a shade smaller, more pointed, and on the whole lighter in colour. But as with the Arctic and Common Terns, so here : I should at once distrust the ornithologist who claimed to be able to discriminate with any finality unless he had seen the old birds.

The island surprised me by its size : I had thought of it as little larger than Puffin Island. In fact it is very much bigger, and strikingly diversified. To the north it is mainly heather-clad hill-side, bare flat slopes with occasional outcrops of rock, full of Meadow Pipits and Wheat-ears. In the centre stands the house set in a little patch of pasture-land. Near it we saw Pied Wagtails and a Spotted Flycatcher. Between it and the southern cliffs is a broken boggy valley, where Stonechats and Whitethroats and Sedge Warblers and the bleating of a Snipe broke in upon the clamour of the Gulls. My day on the Calf was, in fact, an appropriate close to my visit, an epitome aptly summarising the whole. For if ever the memory of Black Guillemot and Peregrine fades or is overlaid by fuller experience, there will remain a dream of rich and varied beauty, a picture-gallery of scenes strangely different but each in its own way perfect. Colonel Madoc wanted me to see it all ; and I have never packed so much into so brief a space. Here are a few of the experiences that have not yet been put on record.

The Currags or great fenland north of Ramsey on an afternoon of mist turning later to steady rain. It is country where once peat has been dug ; full of bog-land where a man may sink at a step to the waist ; overgrown with clumps of sallow, with drifts of bog-bean and bog-myrtle. A Land Rail's voice greets us as we enter it ; a Curlew rises on our left ; Sedge Warblers and Reed Buntings keep up a chorus of comment as we intrude upon their privacy ; a Grey Crow flaps lazily across our front. We are to see a

Water Rail's nest, and are warned that the going will be wet. Afterwards we shall visit the Bishop: partly from respect for his carpets, partly because skin dries more easily than boots, I decide to go barefoot. There are moments among brambles and gorse when I wish it had been otherwise. In a tussock of rough grass rising out of soft swamp where water oozes nearly knee-deep is the nest. She is sitting hard: we are within a couple of yards when the little mother jumps from her eight huge eggs, and beats away with quick short wings, trailing feet and red-marked beak to a jungle of sedge.

The coast below King William's College on a day of turquoise and gold; a long spit of sand-hills and rock, bordering the golf links. There are Shelducks on the seaweed of Derby Haven and a pair of Oystercatchers have laid their first egg on the rocks among the thrift of Fort Island. In the ruins of a little chapel where once a beam was let into the stone a Rock Pipit has her nest.

A tree-clad glen with a water-wheel turning lazily beside the miller's cottage, the banks below it a symphony of spring, and the little stream bursting from its bondage into a myriad sparkling cascades. The air is loud with Wrens, Chaffinches and the plaintive lilt of the Willow Wren. Behind the mill, high up in a damp brown wall, a Grey Wagtail is sitting on her eggs. They will hatch in a day or two, and then the splendour of the cock's plumage will have its perfect setting against the ancient stones in which his brood is hidden.

A rush-grown pond between the mountain and the marsh with Sand Martins flickering over its surface, and a Coot thrusting in and out of the vegetation at its edge. A pair of Little Grebes have a well-grown family here, and we spend a few minutes watching the old birds diving

and bringing up silvery morsels for the little ones—a scene that takes me home at once to Prince's Park.

Peel Castle rising from the rocks, a magnificent ruin on what was till lately an islet; and from its western rim a stretch of broken cliff and a sea dotted with Shags and Black Guillemots. Jackdaws, Starlings and Rock Pipits haunt the masonry which once sheltered the warrior prelates of Sodor and Man—a change wholly to the credit of our times and Church.

And every picture is gilded with a glory of gorse and perfumed with its fragrance: the hill-sides and hedgerows are aflame with it: it studs the cliffs and runs riot in the glens, giving the dominant tone to every landscape and linking them all into a succession of variations upon a common theme. Gorse and the Herring Gulls: those recur in every memory of Manxland; those and the infinite kindness of its people. Sergeant Cregeen and Mr. Collister, Mr. Brindle and Mr. Paul Kelly, these, with my host Colonel Madoc, were responsible for my visits to the birds; and many others, the Governor and the Bishop, the Principal of the College and the Vicar-General, were not less generous in their hospitality and kindness. I went back to Liverpool with all my doubts of the island wiped away, and with a deep thankfulness that such multitudes of my fellow-citizens know it and love it. There cannot be much wrong with people who spend their holidays in its little capital. If they go for picture-houses and dancing-halls, they can hardly avoid getting some infection of a truer and cleaner beauty. And year by year more of them are discovering that the Fun Fair is a poor substitute for Douglas Head, and that to explore the glens and hills is better than to racket round the Tourists' Trophy course on a motor-cycle.

CHAPTER VI

IN EAST LoTHIAN

IT was on May 30th that an invitation to address the Assembly of the United Free Church carried us to Edinburgh. Peggy was dispatched happily to school, precautions were taken for keeping in touch with the family's letters, and for the first time my wife was able to cross the Border with me. We had planned it weeks beforehand; for Edinburgh might mean the Bass, and we had friends in East Lothian: the Assembly was an unassailable excuse for a few days in new country: it proved to be a noble prelude to an adventure worthy of its overture.

Welcome and farewell followed one another all too swiftly in the royal city, and early on the morning of the 31st we were on the little train that runs to Gifford, and thence to Long Yester in the red plough lands under the Lammermuir Hills. By midday we were on the heather, and the whistle of a Golden Plover was thrilling for us through the clamour of the Peewits. Years ago I had found a nest in mid June above Loch Earn: on the Denbigh Moors the birds were not yet sitting on May 5th: with luck we should not be too late for eggs. If they had hatched off, our chances of getting any pictures were remote; and they were the chief object of my desire.

I was just expounding—somewhat pedantically, for, like all dons, the lecturing habit grows on me—how impossible it was to find the babies on ground covered with

yellow mosses and sprigs of bilberry, when a hen bird went off at our feet in an advanced state of decrepitude. Her stumbling gait and trailing wings would have attracted all my attention if a ball of golden fluff running swiftly in the opposite direction had not caught the tail of my eye. As it was, the old bird was neglected; for the youngster was well-grown and quick on his feet, and must be capped before he froze. It was less than ten minutes after leaving the car that I was taking the portrait of my first Golden Plover. A few moments later, when the operation was over, we watched him scuttle away and disappear, and failed entirely to rediscover him. Having seen and searched we had no difficulty in believing that he could be found by touch more readily than by sight. The camouflage is, in fact, perfect, and the colour-scheme more beautiful than on any baby known to me. He is much paler than a Lapwing, a soft lemon-yellow deepening into warm buff and broken up with mottlings of black that completely erase his outline: when he sinks his head, hides the white of his chest, and conceals his tell-tale beak and eye beneath a grass-tuft he is just a few inches of moorland. We spent several hours in the two following days watching Golden Plover: there were three pairs within easy reach; but except for this one lucky accident they might as well have been childless.

Further on in the hills Curlew were abundant: their broods must have been well-grown and were probably being brought down along the streams to the marshy hollows where they grow to maturity. We saw one party of five on the shore under Tantallon, a family that had left home for its schooling by the sea.

Everywhere there were Grouse; the cock birds, very red and richly wattled, going off with chuckles of alarm, the

hens sitting close on eggs or chicks. I put up one from a very juvenile brood and got a picture. Another let me expose a plate on her as she sat deep down in the heather. A third, jumping up from a hollow, was followed by a regular explosion of downy mites with well-feathered wings: they reminded me of a day on the mountains above Arolla when I had flushed an Alpine Red-legged Partridge on the edge of the snow-line and her family had fluttered away in all directions from my feet.

The strangest find of all came forty-eight hours later when we paid a last visit to the moor. We were on the top of a hill, hoping for success with Golden Plover, and I was photographing a clutch of Grouse's eggs, when my wife discovered a nest, deep in heather on the summit, and in it four newly-hatched Snipe. There they lay among the eggshells, three of them still with the white egg-tooth shining on the tips of their beaks, but dry and almost ready to scramble out into the big world. Why, with acres of eligible marsh-land in the valleys, a Snipe should have elected to imitate a Curlew and rear her family on a spot where their soft bills could make no impression on the soil, is one of those questions which upset the writer of textbooks and warn us that generalising about birds is always the hall-mark of ignorance.

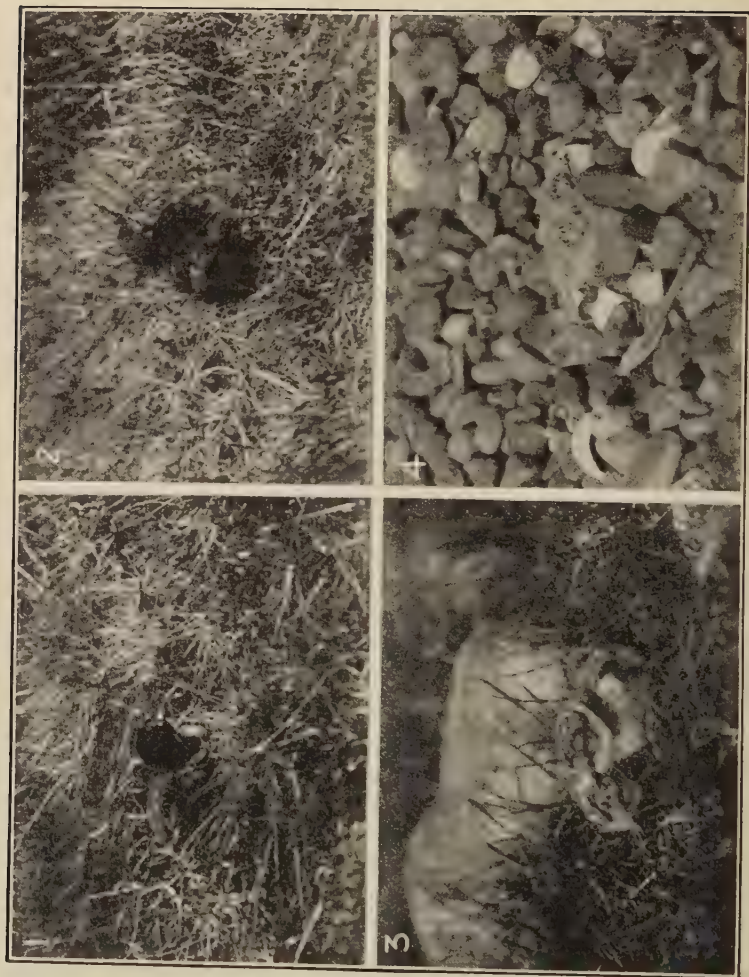
The small birds of the hills did not seem numerous, but that was partly because we had so little time to study them. A pair of Twite and what I took to be their empty nest in the heather, a few Meadow Pipits and Skylarks, and a couple of pairs of Whinchats by the stream-side were all that we saw when we had left the trees. The finding of the Whinchats' nest was my wife's first triumph: it was set deep in a tussock of dry bracken with a stunted juniper five feet away as its occupant's observation-post, and had



FULMAR PETREL



GANNET



1. GOLDEN PLOVER

2. RED GROUSE

3. RINGED PLOVER

4. LITTLE TERN

six well-incubated eggs. I spent a pleasant hour in my tent opposite to it; but though both birds were in close attendance, and the hen made constant circuits, she could not face the last yard or two. That and a Willow Wren's nest with eggs beside a ditch were all that we saw of the small fry of the Lammermuirs, except on our first afternoon when we visited a burn at the Hopes and were beguiled by a busy pair of Dippers, a couple of Common Sandpipers, and a baby Starling. The more desirable birds had no doubt nests: the Dippers made us feel "warm" at a particular bend of the stream where the hen perched above us on a tree, bobbing up and down as she does in the water, and then climbing up from branch to branch like a large dark Nuthatch. But the Starling was shamelessly bold—a mole-skin grey youngster just fledged, who had somehow got down to the edge of the water and had no desire to leave it. He was far too friendly to be neglected, and that evening out of three plates exposed I was able to add three new infants to my Kindergarten.

But it was not for baby Starlings or even for the birds of the hills that we had come to East Lothian; and next day we were booked for the Bass. We had seen it overnight in the distance, a square-cut silhouette against the blue of sea and sky; and my dreams had been of the famous niche and of Gannets clustered around me. But in the morning the upland was in the mist; by breakfast-time rain was falling; and though we pushed off early to Haddington, it was to be met by a telegram from Mr. Kelly warning us that there could be no landing that day upon the rock.

Fortunately we had an alternative—to drive out beyond Dunbar and explore the coast below Cockburnspath, and despite the weather it was put into operation. Down the long straight road that leads to "all the South" till it

nears the coast ; then to the left to a wee fishing hamlet in a bay between red cliffs sheer to the left and falling into steep primrose-covered slopes to the right ; and in the clefts of the western face a colony of nesting sea-birds. At a first glance they were Herring Gulls—experience of the Isle of Man had made me take it for granted—and yet, and yet the angle of the wings was different : no gull ever glided with pinions so straight : no gull ever tilted his wing-tips that way : no gull had so blunt a head, so short a neck, so flexible a tail. And their flight feathers were grey, darker than the back, but quite without black tips. The glasses made their identity certain. We had lighted on a settlement of pioneering Fulmars, an advance-party of the movement from St. Kilda and the north. Low chuckling laughs unlike the cry of any other sea-bird greeted us as we approached : otherwise the birds were silent.

Once seen the Fulmar is unmistakable : if the colour of the quills or the difference of proportion does not betray her, her flight reveals her name at a glance. No bird so perfectly combines dash with delicacy of manœuvre. See her sail round in vast circles with wings taut and straight and motionless, steering her course by slight adjustments of legs and tail ; no bird, known to me, has so supple a rudder, or can bend the outer feathers over so wide a range, sometimes curving them upwards till the tail seen from behind is U-shaped, sometimes deflexing the whole as a brake to stay her course. See her making speed—with a few strong up-and-down strokes driving her through the air with something of the flash of a Falcon. See her hovering over her nesting-place, using every faintest draught of air and controlling it with subtle flexing and beating of the primary joints, floating in the breeze like a swimmer in the sea and supporting herself by the slightest

and yet most masterly movements. Best of all see her as she makes her landing, and note the distinctive method of her airmanship. With gulls, hawks and indeed all other birds that I have seen, alighting is wonderful but simple: long before reaching its perch the bird passes into a glide, flexes its wings downwards against the wind of its course, drops tail and feet, checks its speed exactly at the right moment, gains its goal when its momentum is nearly exhausted, shoots out its legs and grasps rock or branch. If the pace is too great it will make a clumsy and dangerous landing, almost overbalancing and flapping wildly in the effort to stop. More often, in fact with gulls and falcons almost always, the bird will sheer off at the last moment, swing round, circle and make a second attempt. Fulmars, hardly able to stand on the toes and walking like all the Petrels on the whole tarsus, seldom come to ground in this fashion: their descent is much more careful, a process that takes time and deliberate action. They sail in, swinging up at a terrific pace, check their speed almost at once, and hang with wings V-shaped above their backs. Here is one eager to alight on a ledge over my head: there is a cross wind blowing straight on to the cliff: she edges up to it, parallel with the rock, bends forward her legs till tarsus and foot are close up to her breast, holds out her sea-ward pinion at an angle of forty-five degrees, and with the distal joint of the other wing lowers herself gradually, feeling the air and descending with an infinite caution, like an old man lowering himself into a chair: almost one feels that the breeze is a solid thing that she can grasp and hold, so slowly does she ease herself down.

On the cliff the birds were sitting on tiny ledges of grass or stone, very placid and often visited by their mates, who would cough up an oily offering and pass it from beak to

beak. Several of the crevices were apparently only resting-places where two or three birds would settle side by side. Here are a couple obviously courting: the cock has just made a precarious landing after twice missing his foothold and tumbling back into the air. Now he opens his mouth, jerks his head up and down, and utters a harsh haw-haw. Comes a rival, and essays to join the pair. The hen rises for a moment on to her toes: I can see the tarsus straighten clear of the rock. She lunges at the new-comer and upsets his balance; and as he makes off, the cock throws back his open beak and laughs his disdain.

They are still mostly wooing, and we could not be certain that any had eggs, although some of the sitters were reluctant to take to wing, and were ensconced well back upon the ledges. We tried the cliffs from below, over a stretch of weed-covered boulders and up a fall of soft red clay, from the top of which at extreme range I could get a precarious picture of a sitting bird. We tried the top, a jungle of thistles and nettles and ground elder, fissured at the edge with huge and ominous cracks, waterlogged and precarious. But no nest was evident, and the rain, now falling heavily, made photography almost impossible. We had seen the Fulmar; but here at least and without a rope close acquaintance was impossible.

Moving further eastward we came down a steep cart track to the mouth of Pease Burn, where we had settled to lunch. The clouds had lifted a little, and the place was delicious, a tiny stream running down through hills bright with gorse and primroses and clumps of pink campion to a rock-strewn beach. A party of Eiders was at the water's edge—three drakes in full plumage, a couple of brown-backed, white-chested youngsters and a bunch of ducks, which swam off leisurely through the waves as we watched

them. Herring Gulls and a few Terns were resting on the sand. A pair of Pied Wagtails were busy with their brood on the bank of the burn. A hen Wheatear slipped off her five eggs from a small hole in a low bank that separated the turf from the shingle. And on the cliff to the west Fulmars and Jackdaws were busy, though here again we found their nesting sites out of reach.

Finally, along the track till it petered out in a quarry; another visit to the coast, and a tramp along cliffs to a third colony of Fulmars, where it looked as if our hopes would be fulfilled; for a group of them was lying under a shelf of rock on a slope comparatively easy. We hurried round the bay to the spot, scrambled down, saw them take flight, and found an eligible residence entirely empty. Fulmars' eggs were not to be photographed yet. And the rain made us decide that we had done enough.

Next day the weather had cleared and the wind had changed. We were due at North Berwick at eleven, and arrived soon after 10.30 to find that Mr. Kelly had again sent a wire warning us against the expedition. He seemed more sorry for the wasted telegram than for our disappointment; but when we put the position before him, agreed to take us out when the tide rose at one.

With two hours in hand we went along the coast to Tantallon Castle, got down to the shore and made our way under the cliffs to the lighthouse on a rocky promontory to the east. Under the castle the cliff was full of House Martins. Hundreds were building under every projecting ledge, and on the silt of a stream that cascaded down the face flocks of them were settled collecting material for their nests. A pair of Rock Pipits and several Redstarts shared the precipice with them. But of larger birds there was no sign save a dead Gannet on the beach and a few

Eiders off the shore. Not till we got to the promontory did we find anything more; and there, though there were a few Greater Black-backs and a pair of Oystercatchers, we saw little. Four ducks' nests had been made on the rocks, but they were empty: the down lay round them, grey, white-starred heaps of springy fluff; but there were no signs of eggshell and the birds had evidently been robbed.

On our return to North Berwick we found the boat ready, its crew aboard, and Mr. Kelly prepared to take us round the Bass even if landing was impossible. From the shore the sea had looked smooth enough: if there were any sort of harbour we could surely manage it. Once out, though the wind was astern, our hopes faded: there was a distinct swell and a chop on the surface, and the waves were breaking on the island. Hope dies hard, and it was not till we had looked at the little steps running down from the coastguard station that I accepted the inevitable. And once decided upon, the circuit was so wonderful as to leave me little to regret. Seen from the summit the bird-life is accessible only at one place where a cleft runs down the western face. To north and east the rock rises in a sheer precipice from crest to foot, broken only by the narrow ledges with their tiers of close-packed birds—ledges often so small that the huge nests must be balanced precariously upon them. The Bass is a rough cube almost as high as it is wide, a gigantic Sally Lunn of red basalt, splashed and in places wholly whitened with the droppings of its sea-fowl. On the south side the cliff shelves steeply to the walls of the ancient fortress and the modern lighthouse: in the holes of the stonework and in the rough slope below it Puffins make their quarters: they stood along the masonry like rows of soldiers on a toy fort. On the west the crags

are broken by a couple of gullies down which in wet weather there is a miniature torrent. The birds leave these water-courses severely alone; but between them is a vast concourse of Gannets: the rock is well terraced and the nests are thick upon it. This is the scene familiarised in every bird book, a scene which nevertheless far excels its pictures; for the scale of the place, the vast height of the nests above the sea, and the myriads of Kittiwakes that breed between them and the surface of the waves add an unexpected grandeur to it. The Kittiwake occupies the corbels and crevices too small for the Gannet all round the island: one or two nests are barely above high-water mark, and on the northern buttress they climb almost to the summit. On the east there are great caves running into the heart of the rock, awesome places which are no doubt occupied by Shags. Round them the Guillemots are in possession: row upon row of them sit all over the lower half of the cliff and occupy the detached rocks below it; the water is alive with them as we pass. Razorbills no doubt are among them, though I saw very few and mostly on the water. There are no crannies or fissures such as they prefer, and the Guillemots leave them scanty room on the open shelves. One outlying rock had a few Herring Gulls on it, but their main colonies are on other islands up the coast.

As we sailed up there had been no great sign of bird-life; a few Guillemots flew past us; a Kittiwake or two gave us a fleeting glance; but the Gannets keep close to their homes. Certainly nothing prepared me for the myriads of sea-fowl that met us when we swung from the steps and passed the south-west corner. And then for the time I was dazed by it. Clouds of Gannets overhead; a cliff almost solidly draped with them; birds weaving patterns round us in sea and sky; birds that looked small

against the vastness of the precipice, and huge when they swept above our boat. I was dazed, and could only sit huddled in the bows sheltering my lens from the spray and exposing plate after plate in the conviction that among such multitudes to pick my victim was useless, that my best chance was to shoot "into the brown," trusting that the camera would reveal details to which I was blind. That first circuit was a reckless orgy of photography: beyond a few variations of stopping and exposure, and care to see that all was kept dry and that no slides were twice used, I did nothing but shoot. As soon as I paused, some new and nearer ledge, some fresh grouping of birds would call me to further prodigality. I had taken sixteen pictures before we completed our course.

Twice more we made the circle; and then there was leisure to see. The birds were sitting hard: if any had young, they must have been very small, for we saw none feeding babies and the parents were often seated side by side. Some birds were still bringing seaweed to their nests, huge streamers of wrack with which they made clumsy landings. One big bunch we saw slip from its shelf and roll down and back into the water. Other birds were still a-courting; they keep their chivalry into married life, though at several nests the cock only landed by descending fairly on the back of his mate; there was much bowing of the head, much nibbling of beak by beak, and a heavy amorousness curiously incongruous in a bird at once impressive and grotesque. With it all the Gannets seemed neither talkative nor quarrelsome. Perhaps their voices were drowned in the noise of many wings, and the screams of the Kittiwakes and the growling of the Guillemots. We saw one fine quarrel between a couple of Kitties. High up it began, the two hovering face to face and pirouetting in circles

beak to beak in the air. Then there was a pounce: one bird seized the other at the back of the neck, and the two locked together spun slowly down, a hundred feet or so, till it seemed that they would fall into the sea. At last barely a yard above the waves the victor loosed his hold and both birds rose clear. But considering the congestion on every available perching-place, and that birds were sitting literally shoulder to shoulder, the crowd was singularly orderly and well-behaved. Perhaps in April there would be a different verdict to give: competition for a place must be fierce; and although it seems certain that with all these rock-breeding species many if not most individuals return year after year to the self-same ledges, the pressure of the younger generation must be urgent and continuous, and the vacant sites can only be secured by right of conflict. But when once they have settled down, though there may be petty pilfering and occasional quarrels, each of the thousands keeps to his own location.

After our third circuit my regret at not having landed had waned: I was almost grateful to the swell at the steps. Ashore there would have been the familiar fascination of being in close contact with particular birds: I should have toured the island to find the most accessible nest, and then have settled down to study and portray its owners. The impression carried away would have been intimate but restricted: I should have seen the home-life of the Gannet and "made friends" with him. He would have been one more addition to the lengthening list of birds individualised to me, birds that I know as I know my human colleagues. And that would have been a gain, precious as is all such exact acquaintance. But the excitement of close attention to a special pair would have destroyed any such massed effect as the general and repeated survey

created. As it is, the Gannet remains to me a mystery, a symbol, a type; and the Bass is not just the place where I met certain birds and took certain pictures; it stands for the grandeur and prodigality, the awe and wonder of Nature, for something primitive, majestic, almost tremendous, a glimpse of the world where man is not. Bird-rocks have haunted my dreams all my life: to see them has been a sheer joy, the joy of the child coming home; but seeing them, the detailed study of their inhabitants has so fascinated me that the quality of which they were the unconscious symbol has never been realised. It is not that Puffins and Guillemots do not improve on acquaintance: I love them better now than ever; but in enjoying them I have so far missed the deeper experience with which somehow they were associated. The Bass taught me the character of my quest, and gave me what Ireland's Eye and the Farnes and Spanish Head had not given. What has haunted me has not been just a nursery of sea-fowl: it is an aspect of Nature, a scene that shall typify and express the primitive witchery and terror of the wild.

All of us who are in any sense fully men must discover the earth, must come to terms with our home, must catch that sense of its quality which the old poet knew when he summed up his epic of creation in one triumphant phrase, "and God saw that it was good." We have to absorb into ourselves the various beauty of the world in which we live—its opulence and indifference, its softness and austerity, its laughter and its tears. To me Nature is best understood in types: I must register my impressions in pictures if they are to become a true part of my being. The lavish wealth of life, its joy, its friendliness—these are familiar enough. The rolling hills of Rutland sloping down to Wardley

Wood, the horizon beyond the Eye Brook shimmering in the heat, a family of Magpies trailing into the trees and a Bullfinch flashing through the brambles: the long low pastures of the Ouse where the hill above Godmanchester sinks gently to the flats of the fenland, and the ancient road to Cambridge runs through fields yellow with buttercups and hedgerows white with May, a land flowing with milk and honey, where Whitethroats and Corn Buntings express its domesticity and its peace: a Surrey copse perched on the ridge of greensand below the downs, a copse carpeted with bluebells and fringed with golden broom, and below it from Crowborough Beacon to the hills above Havant "the dim blue goodness of the Weald," and the rattle of a Chaffinch overhead and the melody of a Blackcap in the undergrowth: these are what Nature means to most of us. But they are not all that she can show us; and we know it. Beyond the garden is the wilderness with a beauty not less real, the wilderness in which all the deeper lessons of life are to be learned and pondered. Without it our experience is woefully incomplete: we have chosen the soft and smooth, untouched by terror and by tragedy. It is this sterner aspect of earth that has drawn me, this that I have longed to visualise. I thought I had found it on the Breck, where dark fir-woods alone break the monotony of the barrens, and the Stone Curlew, the very soul of the desert, steals ghostly over the flint-strewn wastes. But what I wanted was more tremendous, an energy, a simplicity, a fecundity which it seemed only the tropics could reveal. Desiring blindly I had sought and failed to find until we sailed, a crew of insignificant humans in a tiny boat, around the vast and teeming precipices of the Bass.

If I had landed, I should only have thought of the Gannet

as an interesting acquaintance, as a curiously specialised Pelican. Now he and his home have won a place in a picture-gallery far more precious and more select than my photograph album, the picture-gallery where a dumb poet finds his soul interpreted and revealed.

CHAPTER VII

A DAY ON THE SHINGLE

To the lover of birds the seaboard will always be a place apart, a place at all times and nearly all localities richly blessed with memories. Great cliffs, the breeding-place of Gannets and Guillemots, broad mud-flats alive with Knots and Dunlin, sand dunes with their Terns and Shelduck, a rocky foreshore where Cormorants bask in the sun, and in spring and autumn the Purple Sandpiper flickers from boulder to boulder, even the beach where Wagtails and Pipits take their harvest of the jetsam and Gulls quarrel over offal, each scene has its charm, varied as the moods of ocean, stern and smiling, grave or gay, but always stirring emotions that nothing else can touch. Here in the marriage-bed of land and water life first had its origin; we hardly need the scientists to assure us of it; even mankind feels the sanctity of it, and goes to the seaside as to his home, his nursery, his playground, where he can forget his dignity and be a child again, with a child's freedom to dream and to enjoy. It is not that we would regret the strain and stress of adult life: penitence is better than innocence and there is "good in growing old"; but we want these times of detachment when we can contemplate a man's experience in the spirit of spontaneity, with the awed musing of a child, and recover perspective and a sense of the eternal. Where sea meets earth under an ever-changing, ever-changeless sky, there if anywhere is the mystery that will

reveal to us the parable of our being. Even a day at Blackpool is in some sort an initiation.

Apart from its elemental fascination the coast means to the ornithologist the great migration-routes or the great breeding-places of his birds ; and much of it he is apt to label uninteresting. After Anglesey and the Isle of Man, the Bass and the coast of East Lothian, a visit to the shingle of East Anglia would seem to most of us an anticlimax. Certainly it is a change of key so complete that only a master-artist could achieve it. The whole tone and rhythm of life is altered ; new melodies to suit the new mode are introduced ; only the horizon seaward and the summer smile of the waves give continuity to the theme. And yet these shimmering wastes where the pebble-ridges rise and fall in a symphony of gold and violet between the emerald of the marshes and the azure of the water have a charm peculiarly their own. In colour, though they cannot rival the varying subtleties of mud-flats and sand, they traverse a wider range from the soft opals of dawn to the tawny glare of midday and the amethysts and rubies of evening. They create a sense of spaciousness and expansion of spirit redeemed from melancholy by the variety and courage of their vegetation. How splendid they are, these plants of the shingle—horned poppy and sea-campion, dock and purslane and crimson sea-pea, with herb robert flowering manfully among them, dyeing his leaves to scarlet in the fierceness of his struggle to live !

But it is for their birds that I love them best—for the Pipits and Wagtails and Skylarks that quarter the beaches for food, and for the Redshanks and Ringed Plovers and Little Terns that nest invisibly in their folds. No sea-bird, not even the Puffin, holds a place in my affections so large as the least of the Sea-Swallows ; none of her own adorable

family is so winsome. And she is bound up with a succession of memories. Very early in my days I was presented with one by the local gunner of the Dee, a feckless but kindly ne'er-do-weel who contributed to his old mother's skill in entertaining lodgers, and incidentally to the welfare of the local "public," by teaching the sportsmen of Liverpool the elements of shore-shooting. My Tern had been a target—just that—but mindful of a small boy's keenness, or his parents' gratuity, the tiny corpse was not left on the mud. At tea-time it arrived "for Master Charles," and transformed a rather sombre meal (for tea meant the end of another day) into a feast. My bird book classified him as scarce: he was, I believe, rarer in those days of arrant persecution: my mother must paint his portrait in the morning, and wild plans of having him stuffed beguiled the night.

It was the Little Tern that made me finally forswear the gun, though for a few more seasons September strained my pledge to the breaking-point. I was cruising with a friend, a medical student who wanted to learn taxidermy, and was incidentally among the whitest men that I have known—a man whom I last saw in March 1917 at St. Omer, when he dashed down from the Salient to have a yarn, spent an hour in apologising for having been compelled to transfer from his county's yeomanry to the R.A.M.C., and three days later gave his life heroically in action. He shot a Little Tern, one of a family party: the rest swooped screaming round it as it lay fluttering on the water, trying (so it seemed) to lift it and carry it up into the air: it was not dead when we retrieved it: the throbbing life went out in my hands.

And it was the Little Tern that gave me my first photograph of the living bird. It was on the shingle at Orford,

far away from the colony of Commons, on the last slope to the eastern sea. I rigged up the ancient camera, buried his tripod in mounds of pebbles, laid out fifty yards of line, went off for an hour, returned serpent-wise, pulled the string, and started a new page in my career. It was not a flattering likeness: my wife says justly that it looks like a wooden decoy; and even now I over-expose in those gleaming wastes. But to one whose ambitions had not risen beyond eggs or nestlings, here was a triumph.

Finally, to commend it, the Little Tern, if nowhere so abundant as its larger relatives, is very common and much more widely distributed. I doubt if there are five miles of eastern seaboard between the Humber and the Channel where it does not nest. Certainly I have found its eggs at Wells and Blakeney, Waxham Gap and Eastham Broad, Dunwich and Orford and Felixstowe. It has no objection to the sand, though its choice is the shingle, where the eggs, usually two, often three, and on one occasion four, laid on the bare stones without even a hollow to betray them, harmonise utterly with their surroundings. There is perhaps no nest more difficult to discover. The Ringed Plover is betrayed by the symmetry of its clutch: the four pointed eggs, however protectively coloured, form a pattern that catches the eye. But the Tern's, lying usually side by side, are almost invisible, especially when their ground-colour is buff and their markings large enough to break the outline. The paler forms, tinted when fresh with soft green or blue, are more conspicuous: for the darker ones you may waste minutes in search even when you have marked the sitting bird exactly, and taken a true line to her home. And the nestlings are if possible still better hidden. On their birthday you may find them at the nest, though even then they scramble out as soon as they

are dry, toddle away with surprising speed over the chasms and boulders, find a cranny, crouch and disappear. I shall not soon forget watching their parents feeding a couple on the sand in front of Horsey Mere. Going up to say good-bye I completely failed to see my little friends, and after a long hunt with a shock of fear discovered them, as I thought, crushed beneath my feet: so still they lay in their little hollow with eyes tight shut and bodies flattened to the earth: I had to touch them and see them run to reassure myself.

And the bird itself is delightful, utterly fearless, a devoted lover and parent, graceful beyond all others on the wing, alert and full of the zest of life, the smile of ocean personified. It is less gregarious than the other Terns: the largest settlement known to me is of some fifty pairs. But though scattered all along the coast it likes the company of its own kind. For a mile or so the beach may be empty; then for no apparent reason it will be dotted with them, twenty nests or more in sight at once, and usually not more than a hundred feet apart. Approach them, and the air will be filled with circling fairies and loud with the protest of their cries. And suddenly you will be startled by a sharp scream almost at your ear, as one bolder than the rest swoops down on a long slant almost to within striking distance, flashing past so swiftly that not till the next attack can you discover the source of your alarm. Only occasionally, and perhaps when the eggs are on the point of hatching, will a particular bird thus demonstrate; and I have never heard that she presses her assault home. The Arctic Tern will sometimes strike a man; and at Ravenglass I have seen a stretch of sand littered with dead Black-heads, the backs of the skulls neatly punctured by the needle-points of the Tern's bill: rabbits too they will kill in the same fashion. But the Little Tern, though it will harry

any Gull that trespasses on its territory, and will bicker incessantly both with its own kind and with the Ringed Plovers, can hardly have the power even if it has the will to do much damage, and confines itself to mazy circling, and to a harsh but not unpleasant clamour of annoyance. And when you have passed or settled down the colony resumes its own affairs without delay.

It was after several seasons' absence that on June 5th I got down from Surrey to spend a long day on the shingle. After breakfast at Merstham a quarter of an hour gave me a picture of a Goldcrest feeding young. Her nest, about the size of a tennis-ball and wonderfully wrought of felted cobwebs, was slung from the hanging leaves of a deodar and without pruning was scarcely visible. But the young were large and hungry, and the little mother was busy and fearless. Her line of approach was always the same: before jumping across to the nest she halted on a bare twig of holly: it took only a moment to set up a step-ladder, focus on the perch and secure her portrait. Then to the train, to a series of interviews in London, to Ipswich, and after tea and a change of clothes across Sutton and Hollesby heaths to a bungalow at Shingle Street. A glimpse of Stone Curlews, of Whinchats and Stonechats, a Turtle Dove and a Red-legged Partridge cheered the journey. And when we plunged from the heather to the marsh and so to the pebbles the land was full of birds. It was too late to do more than locate a Tern's nest that night, but we resolved to be out early next morning.

It was not indeed easy to stay in bed. The sun was rising in a veil of pearly cloud when a burst of song (song is no misnomer) wove itself into my dreams. It is always worth while to cut short one's sleep in June for the concert of the birds—that wonderful quarter of an hour at dawn



MEADOW PIPIT AND NEST



GOLDCREST



STONE CURLEW AT NEST

when a single voice, of a Robin or a Thrush, sounds the reveille, and every songster in the land raises a hymn to the new day. Here on the shingle I expected no such awakening. Nor was the melody familiar. It was a rhythm hard to classify: steady, almost monotonous; like barrage-fire heard from five miles behind the lines, it yet resolved itself into separate sounds, a pleasant rippling warble of many voices, most like the noise that a great flock of House Martins makes when it gathers before migrating. I was aware of it, long before I realised its source; it was the morning hymn of the Little Terns. Having always thought of the Little Tern in connection with his alarm note, I had set him down as unmusical, harsh, strident; yet here was sound without any tang to it, sound by no means disagreeable, sound consisting of a succession of notes, not covering a large compass, but soft and tuneful, utterly unlike his scream of irritation or fear.

Thus roused we were out by 5.30 to find the colony busy at its breakfasting. All along the water little fishers were plunging; many of the hens had left their eggs; to others food was being brought and offered with a dainty bow: the song of the returning hunter was one that I speedily learned to recognise. The light was too bad for photography, and the hour rather chilly for the tent. So we contented ourselves with watching, and with a search for Ringed Plover, reserving photography till after breakfast. There was a strip of stagnant water between the shingle and the marsh; and here the Ringed Plover evidently brought their families. I found a couple of babies, not more than two or three days old, squatting obediently on the mud at its edge, one very obvious, the other well concealed by a tuft of grass. A pair or two of Redshanks seemed to be haunting the same place, and a couple of

Lapwings were not far off. Probably all of them found it a good Kindergarten. These and a pair of Yellow Wagtails busily searching the pebbles gave us a pleasant opening for the day.

After breakfast to the tent. My chosen bird had a clutch of three. She was delightfully tame, came to her eggs at once, and then refused to leave them, except when her mate brought her a tiny fish and she slipped off to meet him, settled some yards away, accepted it and returned. After an hour, the sun being distinctly warm, she called to him, jumped into the air and went off. He refused to come and sit, but kept hovering round and over the eggs, settling at his favourite stance, returning to them, and generally fussing over his responsibilities; and I consoled myself by watching a pair some twenty yards away, eventually moving the tent close up to them. They had a single egg, by its colour and their behaviour newly laid. The cock was enthusiastic over it: he had been sitting when I approached and resumed as soon as I was established; but his wife would not put in an appearance. This bears out my experience of other Terns, that when the eggs are being laid the cock sits much more assiduously than the hen, but that later on incubation becomes more and more her sole task. It was interesting to find not far off a nest with newly-hatched chicks, one dead and, I think, born deformed, the other very much alive. The Little Tern is not very regular in its time for laying: fresh eggs and almost full-fledged young can be found side by side in July; but babies on June 9th are earlier than usual.

At eleven I gave up the Terns, having seen and photographed all that I could expect. There were Ringed Plover nesting on the same beach, and though no doubt most of them had hatched off, there seemed signs that

some were still sitting. On a spit of shingle near the Terns we had flushed a bird the night before, and the cock Plover was evidently on guard, running angrily at any Tern that settled on it, and doing his best to drive off intruders. Lying up for a few minutes it was easy to observe the pair, to note the hen's restless movements to and fro, and finally to see her run to a particular spot and settle down on it. Two babies newly hatched were in the hollow, one of them hardly dry, and two others were crouching within a yard or two of it. The old birds were in close attendance but made no attempt to decoy us away.

Before lunch I located another Ringed Plover's nest, this time with eggs close to a small plant of horned poppy and on a bit of beach dotted with isolated tufts of greenery. In the afternoon this was my headquarters. Five yards from the Plover a Tern was sitting; and the two birds constantly exchanged compliments of a not too friendly sort. In the same neighbourhood were a pair of Redshanks; and against them both the smaller species waged an incessant conflict. We found the Redshanks' nest with three eggs in a neat cup in a small patch of sea-campion: the white flowers screened it tolerably, but the track to it was conspicuous enough. It surprised me to find Redshanks, with so many miles of marsh-land available, selecting a site on the shingle; to see the three species nesting within twenty yards was a pleasant experience. After picturing the Tern and the Plover side by side on the same plate I tried to get a photograph of the Redshank. The hen was nervous, not perhaps more so than usual; and though the cock escorted her to within a yard or two of her eggs she could not face the last few steps. Her neighbours sat placidly all the time, except when the Plovers changed places, the hen running up and the cock slipping off, and

when the Tern sprang to wing to take part in a combined attack upon a Black-headed Gull that had strayed into the colony.

At 6.30 I packed up and made ready for our departure ; but before we left, while the car was being got out, there was time for a farewell visit. The baby Ringed Plovers were still on the mud, squatting obediently while the mother's warning note bade them be still : the Terns were quiet on their eggs, or catching their evening meal in the shallows ; and in the hour of my absence the Redshank had returned, and in her nest was a fourth egg. The sight of it put a seal of completeness upon a day of sunny memories.

CHAPTER VIII

NORTHWARD BOUND

FROM the days of my moth-collecting, when Kinloch Rannoch was a name that fascinated me, an expedition to North Britain has always been an illusive hope. And now that birds have taken the place of insects in the centre of my interest, the desire has increased. To find Mergansers and Goosanders in Leadenhall Market, to see an occasional Red-throated Diver or Greenshank in autumn, is to conceive a passion to see and study them in their native haunts. And those haunts are so unlike what the mere Englishman can imagine that to visit them is a stranger experience than to go to Texel or even the Camargue.

Until 1927 my knowledge of Scotland and its birds had been limited to a day at Lochearnhead and two days at Colintrave—each the sequel of meetings for which I had crossed the Border. That summer, after a preliminary visit to East Lothian, we were given a three weeks' holiday in the North, and on June 15th my wife and I, Peter and Joel left Liverpool on our way to the unknown.

We broke our journey in the Lakes to look at the Pied Flycatchers. Three pairs were nesting in the garden with broods of seven, six and six, twelve days old; and the parents were ceaselessly busy. That night, and the next morning, I tried to picture them: it was not their fault that the light was not of the best. In addition by rising early I was able to locate a baby Sandpiper before break-

fast, a bonny little person about ten days old, very white on the breast, very sandy above, with a dark line along his entire length. I had sat still on the bank of the little beck, where the parents' behaviour, and their shrill four-note call, warned me that the brood was lurking. And suddenly the youngster had appeared, skipping over the stones of the watercourse, an exact miniature of his father's actions. He was almost at my feet, but directly I moved he doubled beneath a stone, lay flat, and became invisible. Even when the protective rock was lifted, and the preliminaries for a photograph arranged, he still stayed, as all babies will unless one moves them. This one tempted me finally to set him against a more satisfactory background: I lifted him, put him in the chosen studio, and in a flash he was gone, floating away on winged feet light as a fairy over the stones, through the beck and into a cavity under the bank that ended in a rabbit-burrow. How far down he went I don't know: it was beyond my sight or reach.

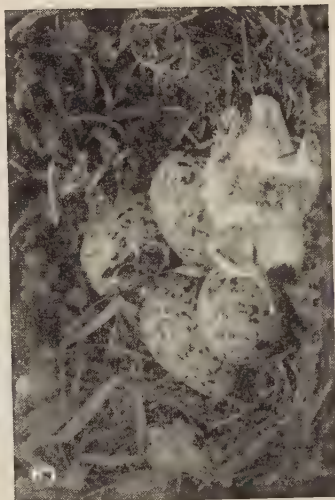
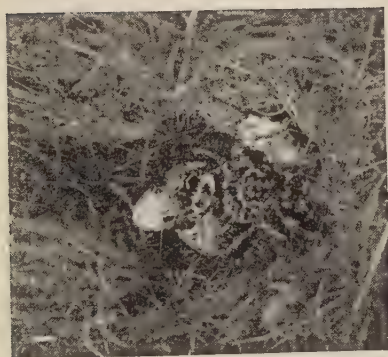
It was appropriate that our holiday should begin with the Sandpiper; for of all birds except perhaps the Meadow Pipit and the Wheatear he was our most regular companion. At Scourie every loch and almost every burn had its pair. We found a nest tucked under a stone not twenty yards from the sea, and a brood of young high up on a lake in the hills. The bird is a delight, graceful and active, sweet-voiced and solicitous; and her babies are more delicious still. We watched them often, noting how carefully they concealed themselves when the parents' whistle bade them be still, and how lightly they tripped over the rocks when danger was over. One which we captured surprised us by taking to the water and swimming off as easily as a duckling; and two days later my wife watched another paddle off to join its mother on a twenty-yard voyage across a corner of

1. COMMON SNIDE

2. RUFFS

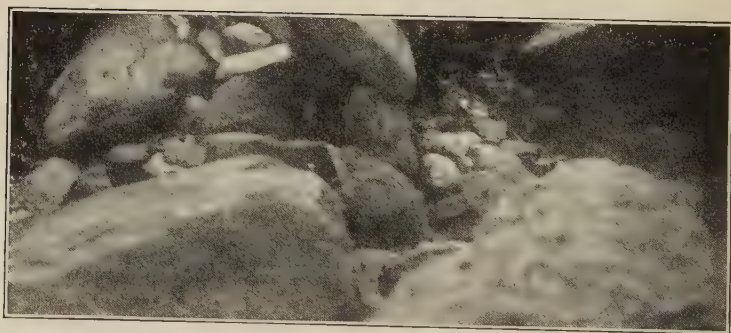
3. AVOCET

4. CURLEW





COMMON GULL ON NEST



YOUNG COMMON SANDPIPER

the loch. When we left Scourie there were still some eggs unhatched, but most of the young were beginning to show feathers. On our homeward journey at Loch Lubnaig on July 9th, a brood was full-winged and almost able despite their fluffy heads to pass as grown-up. We did well to begin with them.

That day we got to Killin; next day to Dingwall: days full of pictures of scenery, of light and colour: the Pass of Leny in the rain, with mist blotting out Ben Ledi and giving to the trees of the foreground a beauty more varied than sunshine; the outline of Schiehallion seen from the Strath of Appin; the Pass of Killiecrankie where the beauty of woods and water was hard to reconcile with pictures of clansmen and bloodshed; the moorland about Drumochter, vast and seemingly deserted, the wildest stretch of country that I have seen; the fir-woods about Aviemore where we watched in vain for Crested Tits; the Moray Firth beyond Inverness and a trio of Mergansers inshore; the mud-flats below Dingwall in the evening light at low water. And so to Lairg and the track across country to the west.

What a surprise it was, that first glimpse of Sutherlandshire. Looking at the map my wife had pictured Scourie in terms of East Anglia, flattish and wet, with land and lake running into one another, a place of pools and pasturage. But as we travelled along Loch Shin, before us were mountains: Ben Stack, which was to be our constant landmark, a magnificent pyramid of rock; Ben Hee and later Ben Arkail, dour summits of sheer granite, and to the south the majestic outline of the ranges of Assynt. And among them lakes innumerable, of infinitely varied shape and surroundings, studded with islands, some reflecting banks rich in greenery and golden gorse, most deriving an added

beauty from their setting of rock and heather. That we were in the wilds was brought home to us before we got to Laxford Bridge, when in the road across our front stood a three-year-old stag, his antlers still in velvet, and his bearing calm and dignified; and to our left on the brae not twenty yards away was another, and over the little river to the right half a dozen more, a big stag, a yearling and some hinds. We came to Scourie, thrilled with the joy of discovery and the wonder of the unimagined; and we found it all, and more than all, that our foretaste suggested.

The corner of Sutherland of which Scourie is the centre is quite unlike any scenery that I have visited. You come to it through country that might almost be in the Grampians. Reay Forest is typically highland, a vast stretch of upland moor and heather with mountain masses on a grand scale breaking up the sky-line. But as you run down from Loch Merkland to Loch More and Loch Stack and the Laxford River, the character of the landscape changes. Instead of open stretches and great hills comes a tangle of greenery and gneiss, twisted and creased into a myriad miniature peaks and ranges, watersheds and valleys. There is hardly an acre of level ground anywhere, and one can rarely see for more than a few hundred yards. Much of the lower land is wet, almost marshy: lakes often very small are everywhere; and everywhere are outcrops of rounded rock, silver in the sunshine, and in the wet taking on a glory of mauve and lavender, pink and rose-red, quickening into violet and crimson where the light catches its surface. Here and there are patches of gorse: on the higher ground there is abundance of ling; but for the most part moorland grasses clothe the slopes wherever the bare rock leaves room for vegetation.

The coast, like the land, is infinitely varied, broken up

into a multitude of islands and promontories, inlets and tiny bays, with here and there a beach of silver sand, but for the most part rent and jagged cliff. Here a heathery slope runs down to a grim chasm where a little burn cascades to the sea: there a steep headland crossed with irregular terraces of greenery rises between buttresses of rock pierced with caves and fenced with islets: further on a reef of piled and fretted boulders runs out into deep water: far away against the evening light is the faint outline of the Butt of Lewis: to the south the stark silhouette of Quinag towers over the nearer hills.

And the people! There is a type of Scot, familiar in fiction and satire, and not unknown in the manufacturing districts of his own and other lands, than whom few human beings are more repellent. Successful because self-confident, efficient to the verge of ruthlessness, devoid of humility and therefore of humour, they make fortunes and die unloved. And their portraits too often represent their nation to those of us who share Dr. Johnson's limitations. The folk of Scourie are as unlike such Scots as they are unlike the English tourists who visit them. They are people unspoiled by machinery, yet full of interest in books and life; cultured, kindly, virile, human, a race for which gentleman in its true sense is the only and inevitable epithet. Winning a hard livelihood from a hard land, they are yet untainted either by meanness or by subserviency. Those who would appreciate the Old Testament, or understand the virtues of Puritanism, or realise the sins against the crofters, should study such folk before it is too late. When they pass away, when the charabanc and the motor-cycle open up their country to the inroads of industrialism, something grand and perhaps irreplaceable will have been lost to the world.

The bird population, apart from the rarities of the neighbourhood, was very interesting. The hotel and village had colonies of House Sparrows and Starlings, a few Thrushes and Blackbirds, and a pair of Robins. In the gorse near to it were Redpolls, Whinchats, Stonechats and Yellow Hammers: in the little hay-fields Land Rails and Corn Buntings: in the wood at the end of the nearest loch a few Chaffinches and Willow Wrens. There were no Rooks, no Jackdaws, and so far as we saw no other Finches or Warblers except the Twite. Rock Doves came in from the cliffs to the fields, with Common Gulls and an occasional Oystercatcher. There were no Woodpigeons and no Lapwings. Outside the cultivated area by far the commonest bird was the Meadow Pipit: everywhere from the mountains to the edge of the cliffs where he joined the Rock Pipit we were within sound of his voice: most were feeding young, but we found several nests with fresh eggs, and saw no signs of first broods on the wing. Next in abundance was the Wheatear, many of the cocks extraordinarily light in colour, nesting in the walls and outcrops of rock and rabbit burrows all round the coast. Pied Wagtails were not uncommon, and near Laxford we watched a pair with a nest in a stone bridge of which the hen bird was a typical and quite unmistakable White: they had five eggs which hatched on July 6th. A few Grey Wagtails and Dippers haunted the streams. Wrens sang merrily round the lower rocks. A Reed Bunting was sitting on a nest near one of the lochs. A pair of Ring Ousels were feeding young on the brae. Hooded Crows and Ravens were not uncommon. A pair of Buzzards were nesting on the cliffs to the west. Kestrels and Merlins were infrequent, but nests were not far off. A pair of Moorhens had their brood in the little pond below the hotel. One or two of the lochs

had Mallards with half-grown young. We saw a few Cuckoos, a few Herons, occasional Grouse, and many Golden Plover, these last much blacker-breasted than those of Denbighshire or even of the Lammermuirs. Curlew and Redshanks were very seldom seen inland. Ringed Plover were not scarce on the tiny beaches.

With such inhabitants there can be only one complaint. The area to be searched is too large. Though the hotel has its complement of Herring Gulls, a sycophant flock who drowse away the day in the meadow or on the stable-roof, and whose reveille woke us daily at five o'clock; though an evening stroll revealed Redpoll and Twite, Wheatear and Meadow Pipit, and in the bay Eiders and Mergansers, Arctic Terns, Common Gulls, Oystercatchers and a Black Guillemot, the haunts of the rarer species were so large and so desolate that the search seemed necessarily fruitless. Had it not been for the kindness of the proprietor and of our fellow-visitors we should have seen little, for we should hardly have known where to begin. I have always thought that the devotees of the gentle craft were a lovable folk; but the human element even more than the birds was responsible for the extension of our stay from one week to nearly three.

Thanks to friendly guidance we began at once, and on our first day made acquaintance with two of the species which I most desired to meet. We were on our way to a loch where there were Red-throated Divers, when the cry of a Greenshank warned us that there was other game afoot. The birds had obviously hatched off: probably their young were half-grown. But during our visit we spent some time in their company. The Greenshank is very similar in habits to the Redshank: he haunts the same type of marshy ground for the rearing and feeding of his brood; he has

the same pleasantly noisy method of welcoming visitors, is, in fact, even more vociferous; he is almost more skilful in concealing the whereabouts of his family; he has the same trick of flying round in huge and rapid circles, alighting on an eminence, bobbing up and down for a time, and then settling down to a monotonous and persistent "yelping." The pair that we knew best had (I imagine) their family seat in a swampy hollow broken up into valleys by bosses of rock. We watched them two or three times in the hope of discovering an infant: each time they were in different parts of their domain: at no time except perhaps at first were we really near their headquarters. After half an hour's wild exercise the two would take up their positions, each on a prominent rock, and chant a duet: once they kept it up for nearly an hour until our patience was exhausted: when we moved they flew off to a different quarter, and began again. Their cries are louder and less musical than the Redshank's. The triple call which they utter when flying has a much more penetrating shrillness, and even to my unskilled ear is immediately distinguishable. When seen clearly the two birds are easily separated: the Greenshank is not only larger, longer-billed and dark-stockinged, but is much more white and grey: he harmonises admirably with granite or limestone rock but would be relatively conspicuous on the mud-flats.

After the Greenshank came the Red-throated Diver; and with him my experience was not of the happiest. We found our first nest easily—a flattened hollow on the edge of a little loch between bunches of heather, scantily lined with grass, and containing two noble eggs lying side by side but "head to tail." One was notably longer than the other, so much so as to suggest a double yolk. The nest was a bare foot from the water, and the "run" up to it was

well-marked. I put up the tent, but the bird was shy ; it was cold and damp, and I came away unsatisfied. Two days later we returned to it to find that the eggs had been taken and the birds had left the neighbourhood.

On June 24th we tried another nest, this time on a tiny islet of rock in a larger loch. Hollow and slide were the same ; but again the eggs were gone and the old birds were absent. Divers eat a lot of fish : if a gillie had destroyed them, one can hardly blame him. But there were other egg-raiders about, and my feelings towards the collector are less charitable. It was a sad disappointment ; and the silence in which I bore it was heavily profane.

That afternoon we set off to yet another loch some ten miles away where a pair had been noticed, and to our joy found them on the water. After a careful search of the banks we discovered a scrape on the shore and what looked like a nest on a tiny island of rocks. But there were no eggs. We lay up to watch ; and eventually the two birds, which had been cruising in different ends of the lake, joined forces and concentrated their attention on the island. Eventually two small chicks appeared, swimming with them. We waited till mother and babies were alongside an open bit of shore ; then I got up, ran round the loch, and found, as I had half expected, that they had lain up under the bank. One swam out, diving pluckily, as I approached ; the other, hidden under a small sallow and tangled in its twigs, was easily retrieved and photographed. He was small, only a day or two old, but very alert and cheerful, covered with sooty down, paler on the throat, with slate-grey beak and feet. He was unable to rise off his tarsus, but sat up well on it, and progressed by jumps, thrusting himself forward clear of the ground and falling on to his breast.

The Red-throated in his spring finery is a splendid bird. The grey of his head and back, the chestnut of his throat and chest, the white of breast and belly and the fine lines of his figure give him a brilliance and distinction superior to any other water-bird except his own near relatives. Yet see him against the surface of a loch rippled by the wind, and for all his bright colouring he is almost invisible. One can just catch the vertical line of his neck where it cuts the lines of the water, but when he lowers his head and peers down into the waves it takes a good pair of eyes to detect him. Occasionally a flash of dazzling whiteness as he rolls over to preen his flanks; sometimes a disturbance as he rises to flap his wings; otherwise red and grey and white harmonise perfectly with the light and shade, the blue and purple of the lake. When fishing he dives without a leap, sliding smoothly down, and remaining under for an average of half a minute. I timed him for a long succession of dives, and found that his absences ranged from twenty-five to thirty-five seconds unless he caught a fish. Then he would reappear at once and swallow it head first on the surface. Under water he might cover as much as fifty yards, though usually he chose a place and worked it.

The pair which had young separated while we were searching for the nest; and when afterwards they met, the cock flapped along the surface for the last few yards towards his mate and greeted her by a double cry and by swelling out the neck, stretching it forward and then bending it up with the beak held horizontally. She took charge of the chicks, but he remained in attendance on the loch.

In flight Divers rise rather slowly, but much less so than a Cormorant. The narrow wings beat rapidly, the neck is held out with the line from the tip of the beak to the breast almost straight. They fly swiftly and circle round

two or three times to gain height before leaving their feeding-ground. On the wing when together or disturbed they are very talkative, keeping up a monotonous gabbling more guttural than that of Geese. While I was in the tent the bird swimming far out and obviously alarmed occasionally uttered a long and not unmusical cry somewhat like the lowing of a cow to her calf.

The Red-throated is a common bird in Sutherland in spite of the efforts of fishermen and so-called naturalists. The land is full of lochs, large and small: one enterprising sportsman has actually caught fish on a hundred of them in a single estate. And you can hardly find a place in the whole area that is out of sight of water. Usually the birds avoid the larger lakes and place their nests on some outcrop of rock where a little rowan or a couple of tufts of heather make a tiny island. Sometimes the site is cunningly hidden under a projecting bank or where a thick growth of ling hangs over a diminutive beach. Of the nests that we saw only one was really easy to discover.

The Black-throated is, of course, very much rarer, and we were lucky to hear news of a pair. They had nested on a small island in a big loch—a usual position for them—and the eggs had been carefully guarded. But when we saw them the bird was not on, and indeed had apparently deserted, for though we saw and heard her overhead, the eggs were cold and neglected. The heavy rain of three days before had raised the level of the lake some five inches, and this would have been enough to reach the nest. In its eagerness to be near the water, so near that it can dip its beak while incubating, the bird does not calculate wisely the dangers of a position below high-water mark. The eggs were noticeably larger than those of the Red-throat, and lay side by side and broadside on to the water. Three days

later we watched the Black-throats feeding on the same loch. Their chequered backs separate them readily from their commoner cousins, and their dives were noticeably longer, ranging from forty-five to sixty-five seconds.

For their feeding the Divers not infrequently flew over to the coast, and there joined the mixed assortment of Ducks, Cormorants, and Auks which fished the estuaries and coasted off the rocks. With the Ducks I was mildly disappointed: I had expected Wigeon and Scoter with possibilities of Scaup and other casuals. Instead there were Mergansers on the harbour, Goosanders on the Laxford River and on some of the larger lochs, and Eiders all along the seaboard. These last were abundant, the drakes still in full feather, the ducks often accompanied by an attendant fleet of babies, two, three, four or five. We spent a pleasant hour one Sunday afternoon watching a family party in a heavy sea running into a rock-bound bay. The hen bird was accompanied not only by four small chicks, certainly not more than a week old, but by two spinsters, probably hens in their first year. Of these last the mother was somewhat suspicious, repelling their advances by sudden dashes through the water, and keeping them always at a respectful distance. Half-way across the bay she met a splendid cock bird, who greeted her amorously, seizing her by the neck and flapping heavily round with her, and then throwing back his head till the nape lay between the shoulders and the beak pointed upwards, and cooing in true courtship fashion. The hen took no notice of him, but led her brood up to the cliffs, where it looked as if the little mites must be dashed to pieces. There for some time she and they were diving, presumably searching for molluscs on the submerged rocks. The chicks all dived simultaneously, appearing after ten to fifteen seconds.

They were completely at home, keeping just clear of the breaking of the waves and riding the rush and backwash buoyantly and without effort. Finally, she took them ashore, letting a big billow carry them up a shelving boulder and leave them safely stranded on its surface.

Though so tiny, the baby Eider was exceedingly hard to catch and photograph. We tried many times in a boat, but never with any success. If the youngsters were far from land, they would run along the surface faster than we could row: if they were by the cliffs, their mother would shepherd them into caves and chasms where we could not follow. A brood of young Red-breasted Mergansers which we flushed from the rocks at Handa led us all across the Sound, keeping their distance without difficulty in spite of the heroic efforts of our oarsmen. And one of the family who had been left behind on the shore till we returned then took to the water by himself and paddled valiantly after his parent over the half-mile of sea to the mainland. No doubt he heard her call; but to us, who could neither see nor hear her, his courage in launching out and his skill in steering a course were alike admirable. And he cannot have been more than a couple of days old.

It is, of course, for its sea-birds that Scourie is known to fame. Now that every tourist is recommended in his Michelin to see Handa, the prospect of a daily trip to the island is likely to be fulfilled. Certainly while we were in the neighbourhood the motor-boat was busy with parties who thought it part of their holiday to go round it. And even to those who call Guillemots Penguins and cannot distinguish a Fulmar from a Kittiwake, the visit is well worth the making. None who see it can go away wholly unmoved.

The island seen from Scourie bay is singularly unim-

pressive. It is large, at least a mile across its shortest diameter; roughly circular, but nearly five miles in circuit; green and smoothly rounded in contour; not flat, but in no way giving the impression of steepness; and on this side edged with low rocks and coves of silver sand. Not until the western point is reached is there any sign of sea-fowl except casual Oystercatchers and Eider Ducks. Then for two miles or more the island ends in sheer cliff, and from base to summit is tenanted by myriads of birds. The rock is a curious conglomerate, unlike that of the mainland and much broken into caves and terraces, shelves and crevices. For the most part it is precipitous, but in two or three places there are broad ledges of under-cliff, and falls of big boulders, and great caverns running deep into the isle, and arches piercing the buttresses of the face. There are two islanded crags, broken off from the main cliff, the Stack more thickly tenanted even than the Pinnacles of the Farnes, and with Guillemots, Razorbills and Puffins sitting cheek by jowl on its shelving summit, and another larger rock where a colony of Great Black-backs is in possession. The whole northern side of the island is broken up into short lengths of cliff, bays and promontories of rock. Everywhere there are birds.

Of the eight species the Guillemot and Razorbill are the most abundant, and are probably about equal in numbers, though the former, as is their habit, are packed into dense masses on their chosen ledges, while the latter are scattered all over the cliff. Puffins are almost confined to two or three areas, and are, I suspect, less numerous than of old. There is not much of the turfy, porous slope that lends itself to burrowing. Kittiwakes are common on all the cliffs though mostly in several big colonies. They occupy the middle and lower zones on corbels of rock too small for the

Guillemot. The Fulmars belong to the higher levels only, seldom nesting far from the top of the cliff and almost monopolising the uppermost ledges. Although it is barely twenty years since they came to Handa, the colony is now a very large one, many hundreds strong and increasing annually. When we visited it in the last week of June most of them were sitting hard: in several places one could look down on to the eggs, though as a rule they were laid close to the cliff, usually on shelves edged with grass or campion, sea-pink or orpine or chamomile. The birds were very fearless, and it was not difficult to find places where photographs could be taken at reasonably close range. We found several small colonies of Shags both on ledges in the caves and arches of rock, and among the boulders of the under-cliff. Only in one place were they accessible, and here the five nests that we found were all stowed away in the hollows beneath broken masses of rock. They were neat nests, made of heather and dry seaweed, and lined with grass and withered stems of orpine; and though the stone around them was splashed with excrement they were clean and dry and much less unsavoury than those of the Cormorant. We found one small youngster, wonderfully reptilian in shape and colour, his eyes bright and open, his skin looking as if newly black-leaded, his wings and legs and neck used impartially in the effort to crawl, quite the most hideous baby I have seen. Otherwise all the nests had eggs, a fact the more surprising since the old birds had almost lost their crests, and some white-breasted yearlings were already on the water.

The tyrants of the island were the Great Black-backs, Herring Gulls and Hooded Crows and a pair of Peregrines on the mainland opposite the Sound. The top of the cliff testified to their exactions. Sucked eggs of Guillemot,

Razorbill and Kittiwake were abundant; wings and skeletons were numerous. I found one Razorbill whose skin had been torn open on the breast and turned inside out, the body to the root of the tail and the neck to the base of the skull. And some of our fellow-guests at the hotel saw a Great Black-back seize a Black Guillemot, carry him to a rock, tear off his head, and then swallow him whole. Puffins were the most frequent victims, but Kittiwakes were not immune. We spent a day tracking down the Falcons, and at their feeding-places the ground was littered with relics of the little gulls. The Peregrine likes to take his prey in the air, and though an Auk does not come amiss, the Kitty is his easiest victim. Round his eyrie were several regular perching-places, and in each the rejected pinions and skulls gave us clear evidence of his diet. No doubt his young were nearly full-grown, and both parents were busily employed in providing for them.

Handa is, of course, unique: no breeding-place that I have visited approaches it for size or for the density of its population. But the whole coast is a paradise for the naturalist or for the lover of beauty. It is very varied; inlets and headlands, islands great and small, steep cliffs and shelving beaches, each with its complement of birds. My chief ambitions were two, the Black Guillemot and the Common Gull; for Handa had given me Fulmars and Shags, and the other sea-birds were familiar elsewhere. The Common Gull had aroused my curiosity on our arrival; for Scourie Bay had a small flock of adults, which must surely be nesting in the neighbourhood. But it was not until the last day that we discovered them. They were on the island to the south of the bay, tenanting the rocks, in a compact and isolated colony. Then, on July 6th, some few still had eggs, but most had hatched long ago; and the young were showing feathers, and at the awkward age when

they scramble clumsily over the boulders and lie low with an astonishing patience.

The Black Guillemot was even more elusive. Odd pairs of them were scattered all along the coast, and the channel of the bay had usually a single specimen. We spent several evenings searching for his home, but could find no trace of it: nor did we see his mate, or watch him to the rocks. Only on July 5th were we free to make a real effort to discover them. Then we were able to get the help of the gillie who knew the bird-life of the neighbourhood best. He told us at once that though casual birds might nest elsewhere there was a little settlement of Tysties on one of the islands in Badcall Bay. And to my enormous delight he offered to take us to it.

It was a long beat southward with queer currents and shifting wind; but the place was worth a voyage. Round the rocks as we approached floated a dozen Black Guillemots, round the island were several more: off the little inlet where we could land a bird with a tiny fish in its beak was waiting. Just as we made the rocks from a pile of boulders ten yards away sprang out another. Surely she must have a nest. Fortunately we had marked the place exactly: otherwise we should certainly have failed. Indeed the place seemed quite empty until far down in a crevice, blocked by a great stone and approachable only through a tiny hole, my wife spied a movement. Levering out the mass that sealed the entrance she could survey the cavity; and in it were a couple of newly-hatched babies, little fellows clothed in black down with leaden-grey feet, black beaks, and the most splendidly carmine gapes. No wonder the Black Guillemot is elusive when he hides his dwelling so successfully. It was a rare stroke of good fortune which gave me almost on my last day in the north newly-hatched babies of the species which beyond all others I desired. I have

never taken a photograph with greater difficulty, nor yet one that filled me with so glad a sense of accomplishment. Here was a reward after a week of acute pain, a reward which thanks to the skill and strength of our guide I was able to reap in full.

Then while I stayed in the boat (for climbing was beyond my powers) the others searched the island. An Eider's nest with four eggs, and a very amenable Shag who had built on an open ledge and refused to leave it, were their chief discoveries. They took photographs of them both, and then on their return my wife successfully stalked the Black Guillemot. She was very tame, or very unwilling to leave the rock beneath which her babies were hidden; and from the boat I could see that at least one plate had been successfully exposed. There is something peculiarly winsome about this smallest of our native auks: all that morning they were swimming and diving round the boat, drifting in to the shore, then rising quickly and flying out, only to work their way back with the tide. I timed a few of the birds that were fishing and found that they stayed below the water for a full minute quite frequently. It was a delightful day, made all the more exciting by the hope that the landing-party would have what my friend Heinrich calls "full success."

So far I have written of Scourie without reference to the chief excitement of our visit, or to the episode which gave it a touch of glamour and of irony. Scotland to the Southerner, and to the naturalist, means the Golden Eagle. Divers and Greenshanks, Fulmars and Black Guillemots, Buzzards and Ravens and Peregrines, these are well enough: they fascinate, but they do not stir the blood.

I had frankly set down the Eagle as beyond hope, partly for his rarity, partly for the inaccessibility of his eyrie. But after a few days, when my good faith was



BLACK-THROATED DIVER'S NEST



GOLDEN EAGLE'S NEST



1. SHAG

2. RED-THROATED DIVER

3. BLACK TERN

4. OYSTERCATCHER

becoming established, I began to hear hints. Eagles were certainly in the neighbourhood. Several pairs were known to be not far off. Here and there the royal bird was seen. Once at least a nest had been photographed. In these days of motor-cars and touring egg-thieves one must be cautious in pushing enquiries. It was necessary to go carefully to work. But in Reay Forest Eagles were protected, and a proper application for leave to visit them might not be refused. And so gradually it was done. Leave was graciously given. Keepers were visited. A day was fixed. And on June 28th we set out for the eyrie.

It was a day of mist and almost ceaseless rain, a day singularly ill-suited to photography. But we were used to wet, and if only the hills were not too thickly veiled, pictures could be managed. And usually the weather improved in the afternoon. We got to Mr. Scobbie's cottage for lunch, heard that all was well, and ate a festive meal in the car attended by a devoted cow with a passionate appetite for paper and string. Then a drive of a mile and we took to the brae. Three miles of track along the bank of a swollen burn up into a huge and shallow glen at the back of Ben Arkail brought us opposite an outcrop of rock on the slope of a heather-clad hill. Here with the country laid out below it, at no great height, but in a fine position, was the eyrie. Five hundred yards over swampy heath from the stream and we were beneath it.

The site was not unlike that of the Buzzard's nest in the Lakes, though on a far larger scale. It was in a great ledge or pocket framed in stone, a smooth crag overhanging it, and a tumble of broken granite falling sheer below. The nest itself was set well back behind a birch; it was a great pile of sticks well flattened and hollowed, some six feet across, between the tree and an angle of the rock. To reach it was a climb of a bare thirty feet, and then the

ledge, and an abundance of space for tripod and camera. To see the great nest so near and so easy to photograph, to know that it contained a well-grown youngster, to realise that in a few moments I should see my first Golden Eagle—this was to taste a new and irresistible excitement.

Was it excitement, or pride, or mere folly, or a blend of all three that set me scrambling up the rock? Mr. Scobbie had brought a rope, and warned me that previous visitors had used it. The rain was falling steadily, hands and feet, soil and stone were sodden with wet. I have neither the skill nor the physique for climbing; but I went at the crag without a thought. The first footholds were easy: then a wee cornice and a wriggle round an overhanging boulder to the right along a ledge. The fool rushed in and on: failed to make the traverse: felt his foot give on a tuft of grass: stretched for a handhold and couldn't find it: knew for an unpleasant moment that a fall was certain: and fell. First the groin on a projecting spike, then flat on to head and shoulder: it was not a long drop, but its incidents were singularly unpleasant, and its result was a nasty mess at the place from which a few minutes before my hopes had soared so high.

And so easy it looked when, after the first fierce pain was dulled and the gash on my head padded up with moss and a handkerchief, Mr. Scobbie went up to the eyrie. He hauled out the Eaglet for me to see, a fine well-feathered youngster with his quills nearly full-grown but his head and body still white and downy; and I managed to struggle on to a flat stone and expose four plates in his direction. But for me that was the limit of my acquaintance with him. I could scarcely stand, and there were three miles to travel. Birding was over for the present.

They got me down, Scobbie gentle and strong and patient, and my wife, who is far from strong and must have

suffered worse than I did. With an arm round each neck, with an infinite care to find footholds (for I could hardly move my legs), with pauses every few yards to grapple with the pain of it, we managed those miles somehow. There was no other way; and the wound in my groin was not yet stiff; but I have never loathed the horror of war so much as when that day I remembered that such a journey down the interminable duck-boards of the Salient was the lot of a multitude of my comrades, an incident so common as to be hardly accounted great.

That memory, and the conviction of my own egregious folly, and the regret that I had lost the pictures of a lifetime, and the knowledge that I had spoiled the holiday for the MacIvers and my wife—those thoughts, and at intervals a queer sense that it was worth while to have seen my peculiar fear face to face and to have gained a new experience of pain, helped me along. There is, even at the worst of it, a certain joy in overcoming, a certain exaltation in the testing of manhood which is, I think, an authentic, though not the finest, part of fortitude. And in due course the journey had its end: hoisted into the car, warmed by a hot bottle, a cup of tea, and three fingers of whisky, steadied by a puff of tobacco, whirled off to the hotel, stitched up fore and aft, tended with a care and kindness for which we can never make recompense, I had everything to be thankful for.

Yet it was annoying, when I might have been pursuing the Greylag Goose or trying conclusions with the Mergansers, to have to spend a week in learning to turn from back to side or to hoist my legs an inch or two from the horizontal. And still more annoying to have been so near an Eagle and been fool enough to let him go unphotographed. However, if not this year, then next year or some time, the Eagle and I will play a return match.

CHAPTER IX

ON THE LANCASHIRE COAST

JUNE 15th, 1925, is likely to remain a red-letter day in my birding calendar for some time. It is not often that a single day's holiday yields all that one hopes of it; and I have never before "tented" and pictured three separate species with a single hide and no preparations within five hours.

For the first fortnight in June work had been heavy, and there had been no possibility of relaxing. So during the heat-wave, when birds were at their best, I saw nothing of them. My Bishop had indeed insisted upon a weekly Sabbath for his clergy; but as he showed no signs of setting an example, I could not follow it—until the memorable day. The weather, which had threatened to change on the 14th, recovered its splendour, and it was with very light clothing and as light kit as I could manage that I started at 8.30 for a visit to the Terns. By the time I reached them, tent and camera and glasses were a burden; but a burden worth the carrying.

There are few sounds more attractive than the cries of nesting Terns—a curious taste, no doubt, but I have no ear for music, and am perhaps over-influenced by association. Malahide and Blakeney and Orford and Bloemendaal all help to explain my joy in what should perhaps be unpleasant and is certainly not meant to please. To get away from the clatter of lorries and the clang of trams, from streets, yes and churches, to the sandhills and the

sea and the maze of white wings against the blue—that in itself is holiday enough.

But I had come with a fixed plan. Terns are easy to photograph. It seemed likely that if we could find eggs hard set I might get a series of pictures in an hour or so. Then if, and this was a larger if, the Ringed Plover had not all hatched off, we might put the tent up for them, go off and lunch, roam round the preserve, and still have time to get a picture or two before my train. Or of course there might be the “something special” of which one always dreams. If the Plover were off there would be plenty of babies—Terns, Black-headed Gulls, Oystercatchers, Redshanks and possibly Shelducks—to search for. So my eight plates—the full charge of my veteran camera—would be well employed: indeed would have to be scrupulously husbanded.

I was met at the station by a friend who assured me that with the Common Terns were a few Arctics, and that we might manage to locate a nest or two, as they haunted a particular neighbourhood. This was exciting—a new bird to me if we could only find it; but with 300 pairs or so of its cousins to hide itself among I was secretly not optimistic. Anyhow the plan should stand; for Ringed Plover still had eggs.

So off we went, a long tramp across the sandhills, to the corner of the “Ternery” where the strangers had been reported, selected a Common Tern’s nest in which one chick had emerged that morning and the two remaining eggs were chipped, and set up the tent by 10.45. It was a hot walk and a hot vigil, but not a long one, and full of incident. To begin with, the baby discovered a dislike to the sunshine. He held up his beak and gaped once or twice, as his mother circled round, and then set off to find

an oasis in the desert, finally thrusting his head behind a tuft of spindly rushes. His parents were by this time getting over the invasion of their privacy: the cock was walking about in the neighbourhood, and the hen soon alighted by her baby, stepped to her eggs, sat down and called him to her. When he found his way back and stopped to be kissed, I could not resist the picture that they made. It is, in its way, one of the most attractive I have ever taken.

She rose, but only for a minute or two—just long enough for the baby to start off on his travels, this time to a plant of ragwort. His father evidently felt that now it was his turn. While she toddled up with the tiny and rather mincing steps of her kind to look after the infant, he decided that the eggs ought not to be left and alighted at the nest to cover them until his wife was ready. For the moment I lost my head: she was certainly out of focus and he was nervous, and by the time I had taken my picture was on the wing; but the sight of them so close was too much for me, and a plate was wasted. I wanted four for the Ringed Plover; two remained: I must be more cautious. Still it was worth while trying to get both birds, and if focussing were done carefully it ought not to be impossible. My tent was as a matter of fact too close, barely four feet away; and with no reflex or even viewfinder available, one had to mark the exact limits of the field of definition and hope that the birds would come into it. My third attempt was poor: he had come on to the eggs, but seeing her approaching rose and walked towards her. He was sharp, but she was too far away—perhaps by six inches. However, they were very complaisant. I could just cover the nest and get my picture clear nearly up to the ragwort. If the hen would lead back the baby

while he was sitting, they might both be taken. Five minutes later she did so, stepping out beyond the plant into territory that I knew was within range. I got him on the nest and her standing behind it—a satisfactory picture. My first bird was finished: two out of four: it wasn't creditable, but would suffice. They had been very kind to me, and had given me a better knowledge than I had ever gained before of the "points" of the Common Tern. In my youth I had always believed that whereas the Arctic was pearly-grey on breast and belly, the Common was almost white. These birds were both plainly grey—that wonderful opalescent colour which seems to have light shining through it, and which one expects to see flush, as it does in the Roseate, into the pink of dawn. Their beaks were distinctly dark-tipped—hers a true scarlet with a strong contrast between it and the black, his a deep coral shading into dusky.

At 11.30 we moved to the Ringed Plover, set up the hide, and went for a stroll to see how the other inhabitants of the sanctuary were getting on. Black-heads were just hatching: in one nest a moist chick was just crawling out of the egg while his two brethren, looking more than twice as large, were scrambling about a yard or two away. Baby Terns were everywhere: how their parents collect and feed them is a perfect marvel; for they all look exactly alike and seem to scatter all over the sandhills. No doubt each brood has a sort of nursery or rallying-point; but they do not keep together, or apparently very handy to it. The old birds when returning with food settle on a prominent place, and the chicks, presumably their own, run to them or, if they are too small, call out to attract their parents' attention. The warm weather had given them an excellent start and they were thriving on it, spending the days of

their rather long infancy well concealed in the tangle of dwarf willow.

At 12.30 I decided to go to my tent and eat my lunch there, while my companions went off to less restricted quarters—the watcher to his farm, my friend to a sandhill near the place where he was convinced that Arctics had been seen. I was expecting a long wait, and was delighted to have the hen bird running round the hollow in which her nest was placed within ten minutes. Finally, she came up to her eggs, and seeing a very attractive pose I broke all the rules and took her. Then for a time she was nervy, and I had the joy of watching the familiar ruses by which she beguiles an enemy. She would come, calling plaintively, nearly up to the tent; then turn, sink her head, spread and depress her tail, and creep away in the attitude of a courting pigeon. Then in a few yards her wings would begin to flutter: now she raises the left one and waves it helplessly above her—obviously it is broken and quite uncontrollable. Poor bird, she is surely in the last stages of exhaustion: her head droops and she utters a series of rapid panting groans: her wings hang half expanded, trailing on either side. Finally, she collapses altogether, and lies almost invisible on the sand, a mere heap of dishevelled feathers. The most unexpected touch comes at the end. Just when life seems quite extinct she springs up with a quaint look of self-satisfaction, and stands there her own alert and eminently healthy self, as if expecting applause for her performance. I gave no sign; but she produced many “encore” exhibitions before at last settling down, and working her way back to the eggs. I took her sitting, and had just used my penultimate plate on her as she was walking on when my comrades reappeared. As the cock Plover had several times visited his wife, descend-

ing from his observation post and running round the nest with her, I had been prepared to spend the afternoon and my last plate on an attempt to get them together. But the news for which I had been interrupted banished any such idea.

While lunching Mr. Wagstaffe had located the Arctics: indeed they were nesting on a bare stretch of sand just under the hill on which he sat. He was convinced that this time there was no doubt of it, and suggested that we should shift the tent and try to get them with the last plate. The birds were very bold and it was not yet 2.30.

The change took very few minutes, and I soon found myself opposite a single egg of a pale olive-green spotted with sepia, and entirely indistinguishable from the similar type laid by the Common Tern. This did not encourage me, for though it seemed strange that the Common, which usually lays three, should incubate a singleton, it had been my belief that Arctics usually laid browner and smaller eggs than their relatives. However, I focussed and was left alone to solve the problem.

The answer was not long in coming. As soon as the clamour began to abate a long-tailed, long-winged shadow appeared on the sand, and after a preliminary circle or two down dropped an unmistakable Arctic. Coming as I had done from close contact with the other species it was amazing to think that they could ever be confused. This bird was less grey below—though the difference was very slight: the beak was clear and shiny scarlet—the exact shade of fresh arterial blood: the wings and tail looked proportionately longer. But what separated them at once was their appearance on the ground. The Arctic's legs are ridiculously short, and when she walks she seems to be scuffling along almost on her belly. Every twig and root was

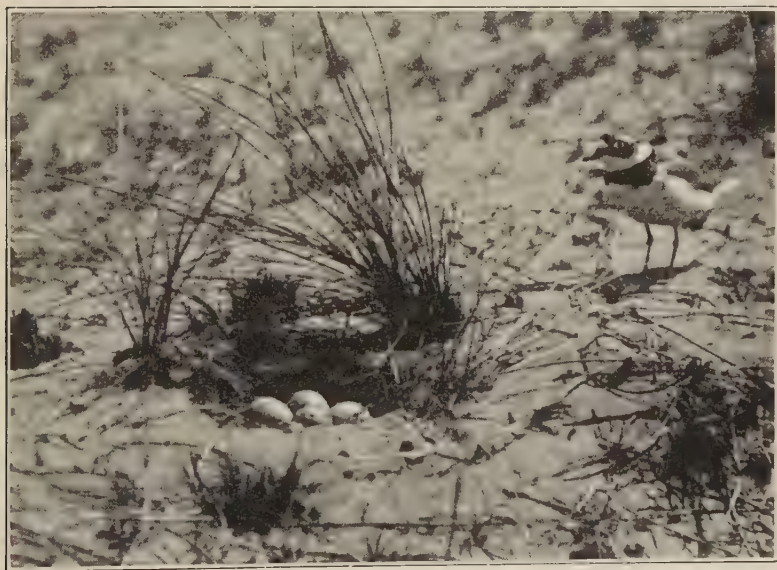
a trap: she was constantly tripping, and then would change her direction, or else stop and very elaborately, like a grand lady climbing a stile, lift her little feet over it. Nevertheless she was very energetic, scuttling along at a fair pace from side to side, but not yet able to screw up her courage and reach her egg.

I speak of "her," though at the time I assumed that this was the cock come down to spy out the land, and assure his spouse that all was well. Dearly as I should have liked to get a picture, I dare not risk my last plate until the egg was actually incubated. With one bird so near my time would come soon. It came suddenly. While the first comer was still taking pedestrian exercise, the other dropped at the hollow of the nest. This had a slightly darker beak—blood-red at the base but shading to crimson at the tip. I made sure that it was the hen, but discovered later and beyond doubt that I was wrong. It was the cock; and when he had settled down I took his portrait and departed at 3.15.

Three birds of different species in a day was no mean success; and the Arctic was wholly unexpected. Indeed its occurrence in this particular spot as a breeding bird had not been proved indisputably and the watcher was wholly sceptical. Now the point was settled; there can be no mistake when one spends an hour within five feet first of one species and then of the other. My only regret was that I had not got a picture showing the very characteristic pose and proportion of the bird on the ground. Indeed, fortunate as I was in securing it at all, it was annoying to have only one portrait, and that necessarily a dull one. Terns always fascinate; twice before I have played truant for their sakes: this time there was really no reason why I should not spare part of the next day. I had to be



COMMON TERNS. *Chick just hatched*



RINGED PLOVER AND NEST



ARCTIC TERNS. *Cock sitting*

in Liverpool for the early morning and evening; but without difficulty or shirking should be able to get three hours at the nest.

June 16th was dull and cooler—none the less pleasant on that account; and by eleven I was safely installed with my tent broadside on to a gusty wind, and every hope of obtaining a series of pictures. The egg was as I had left it: the birds evidently sitting close: the light good without being glary: and the time ample for observation. To get the birds walking and if possible together; to separate and define the sexes; and to spend a long quiet interval in their company in the hope that they would do something unusual; that was my purpose—not very exciting to most people, I suppose, but at least eminently restful.

“Blood-red beak” soon descended, and, as on the previous day, took long and vigorous exercise. I got a picture—not a great success—and then, when at last the egg had been safely covered, another. The wind was very strong, and when the bird was turning and came broadside on to it there was almost a disaster. The exposure was too much to sit through, and to my joy at the next visit both appeared, crimson-beak following his mate to the nest and giving me a portrait after she had flown. Misled by the colour of their bills, I was still convinced that the brighter and braver one was the cock, though now my assurance was shaken; for the second comer had had a very different carriage—head erect, neck at stretch, altogether a more masculine figure. At the next visit fear was over. Blood-red sat down placidly, and her mate burst into song, a cheerful kek-kek-kek-kek rapidly repeated and at great length in a low, sleepy tone like the sound of a distant cog-wheel; and singing departed. For about an hour

there was nothing to report. The Arctic sat, and I lay, at ease: she occasionally rising and pushing the egg into a comfortable position; I less often stirring from elbow to elbow.

At 12.30 my companions came to inquire. They had found nothing new, and I had failed of my intentions: so I sent them off and stayed where I was. My sitter was back in a few minutes, all alone and evidently unalarmed. I ate my lunch, lit a pipe and prepared to doze. Suddenly I noticed that she had stirred, and was apparently not quite comfortable. She was depressing her tail as if she would rest it on the ground; and her wings were nearly horizontal instead of having the tips pointed slightly upwards. She appeared to have risen slightly from her seat; her breast feathers were no longer flapped out, and must surely be off the ground. For a moment I thought she must dislike my tobacco: then I noticed that behind her legs and right under the root of her tail her egg was appearing—with its blunt end to the ground. It must, I thought, be very uncomfortable if it had slipped so far back: why doesn't she get up and put it under her properly? She stayed still for perhaps a minute, the egg seeming to prop up her tail, herself quite silent and motionless. Then she rose in her nest; turned round, and behold two eggs where before had been one. She had laid it before my very eyes. When I first saw its end, it seemed deeper in colour than I remembered; and now, though both were in shadow, the new-comer looked a bronze-brown, certainly much darker-complexioned than the first. Whether eggs at their laying are, in fact, covered with a secretion which makes them look dark, I don't know; but I am positive that at this time the two eggs were very distinct. Half an hour later the shade had changed, and though the second was more

heavily spotted the ground colour of each was identical, a pale olive-green.

It was an extraordinary occurrence. We had found the one egg at midday on the 15th, and the birds were sitting close. Now at 1 p.m. on the 16th a second had been added. Do Terns usually sit from the first egg? And if so how do their clutches hatch out so nearly together? And the simplicity of the actual performance amazed me. The movements that I have described were very slight—so slight that a photograph would hardly have shown them. I should never have noticed them if I had not been watching her so long and closely. And they were absolutely all. There was no excitement, no cry of any sort, no spasm or sign of convulsion or effort. The egg appeared easily: she got rid of it, turned, pushed the two side by side, and then tucked them away under her breast. One small touch which pleased me vastly was that when, soon after, her husband came to take a turn on the eggs he sat down securely upon the one and failed for some time to realise that another was lying out in the cold beside him. When he saw it, he started, jumped up, and proceeded with a penitent alacrity to repair his neglect, rather clumsily rolling the new-comer round the hollow until he could settle down upon them both. His surprise at this addition to his family was delicious to see.

He came back when after a safe interval I decided that somehow I must picture both birds together. The hen was quite used to my noises, but by putting out a hand she could be induced to slip on to the wing. After one or two trials he joined her, and when she next walked to the nest he was in close attendance, the carriage of the head and neck and the darker bill at once separating him from her. Again I beckoned her to move, and next time she began a

walking-tour while he alighted at the eggs and sat. When he had done so, and discovered and welcomed the new arrival, she walked up to his side, thrust her beak under his wing, levered him off the eggs, and when he took the hint and departed stepped into his place. But not for long. Wanting to see him turned out again, I "moved her on": but this time he came alone; and for the rest of my visit took his spell of household duty unaided.

When once the two birds had become familiar their shape and gait distinguished them more readily than the colour of their beaks. Even when sitting the cock looked much longer in the neck: during all the time I watched him he never let his head sink as she always did. When walking this difference struck the eye at once. In the air I could not separate them: the length of tail was conspicuous as between them and the Common, and when they were hovering head to wind over the nest and every tail-feather was spread to the uttermost as a brake to hold them in position, the proportion of it was very noticeable; but as between the sexes neither observation nor photographs showed anything recognisable. He was slightly larger—beak longer and consequently narrower-looking, wings a trifle longer, figure much more fine-drawn; but except when they were together or pictured in identical positions and from the same spot their size was an insufficient guide. As it was, if I had not seen her lay, I should perhaps have hesitated; for the two were only seldom in view at once, and then there was always the anxiety for a photograph to distract one's attention from a detailed comparison.

I was in the tent for three hours—so my watch testified. In reality, for time cannot be measured by the clock, it was for a span which might have been a few minutes or half a lifetime. Those seasons of quiet when all one's

ordinary pursuits simply cease to exist, when one enters into another atmosphere, another incarnation, and in it lives simply in the contemplation of creatures free and joyous and unsophisticated, are not to be measured by the incidents on which memory fastens and which alone can be written down. Their true meaning eludes description, though when once they have become part of one's experience there will be times when what has never risen to the conscious mind will nevertheless be seen and felt once more, when a peace garnered in such days will wrap one round, and in the midst of worry and stress bring healing and repose of soul.

When next I visited the Ternery the scene was totally different; for it was on September 23rd—a fine day in a wet month, with a strong wind blowing off the sea, and the clear light that comes after rain. The sandhills were deserted, not a bird except a few hovering gulls, and, by their voices, a Curlew or two. But on the shore as the tide came in much might happen.

I had never seen the great assemblies of waders in autumn; and my acquaintance with this particular stretch of coast in August had led me to expect little. A few parties of Oystercatchers, a whisp or two of Dunlin along the sea, a few Redshanks—these and gulls were the limit of my ideas. Once indeed I had seen swimming close inshore a Great Crested Grebe in almost full plumage, and once a Guillemot and a few Scoters; but nothing either in numbers or varieties to warrant the descriptions of such gatherings.

When we arrived on the beach my expectations were fully realised. It was not far from low water: the waves were breaking nearly half a mile away, and birds were few and far between. Indeed as we strolled along the coast a

big flock of gulls, nearly all Herring, but with a few Great Black-backs conspicuous among them, and a few domestic pigeons were the only signs of life. Then beyond them a long black line resolved itself into a mighty company of Sea-pies, resting leisurely far out on the flats. Otherwise there was nothing.

Had I been alone, no doubt I should soon have given it up and contented myself by collecting a few shells for my small son. But my companion was Mr. Coward, and he knew what to expect. Not far from our stretch of coast are the mud-flats of a big estuary, a far better feeding-ground than the shore. At low tide all the waders congregate there, and until the flow covers their larder the seaside is deserted. High water that day was to be at 3.15: we had arrived at noon: there was plenty of time for lunch and tobacco. I shall not soon forget the next two hours, for it has been seldom that I have had the chance of meeting experts; and none of them know as much about the birds of our area as my companion. We had settled down out of the wind behind a sandhill and got up once or twice to scan the shore: but beyond the fact that gulls grew more and more abundant there was little sign of interesting arrivals.

Not till close on three did the change come. By then the gulls had assembled in multitudes. All along the coast were huge flocks, silvery white to the north of us, and iron-grey where they stood against the sun. Ninety per cent. of them were Herring, mostly in white plumage and many still moulting: Greater Black-backs were fairly numerous—single birds mixed up with the others. Lessers, both light and dark forms, were there but not in any numbers: Commons and a few Black-heads made up the total. It must have run into thousands. Hitherto

they had been almost alone, sitting leisurely and silent, and in places cloaking the sand in snow.

Now on a sudden there was movement. From the south came past a huge flock of Oystercatchers and Godwits, trailing along in a great string—far more of them than I had seen or imagined; and as these settled and we were walking towards them, from the north another and a far more vast army, a cloud of birds that seemed to stretch for miles and smudged the sky as they turned and their dark backs caught the light. The two hosts pitched together: we studied them for some time from the cover of the sandhills, and then, getting safely away from them, walked out towards the sea, so as to come down to them from the south. As we approached the scene was beyond all description. At the water's edge were bunches of Sanderling, very tiny, very white and very restless, flickering in and out with a delicacy peculiarly their own. Beyond them were a flock of Grey Plover, thirty or forty birds standing in the shallow water, perhaps a third of them splendidly black-breasted, the rest presumably youngsters. And behind them the main body, the waders, stretching back a hundred yards from the sea, and the gulls between them and the beach. It was upon the former that our eyes were riveted; upon birds not in parties or flocks, but densely packed and seemingly innumerable. In the centre was a great wedge of Knots standing head to tail in a phalanx so close that it looked like a solid and single strip of grey felt, bordered at its edge by a line of white fringed with black tassels, and splashed in two or three places with the vinous pink of birds still in summer dress. As we approached a battalion of them took flight: sea and sky were completely shut out by the screen of moving wings; but when they had left the horde seemed as large

as before. Around them were a multitude of Bar-tailed Godwits drawn up like skirmishers in extended order, their colour when seen in mass more decidedly buff than the greenish-grey of the Knots, and their longer legs and beaks very conspicuous. Among them was one magnificent specimen with the brick-red breast and dark back of the breeding plumage. Outside them again were the Oystercatchers, mostly young birds with white collars, numbering very many hundreds, and contrasting splendidly with the khaki of their smaller companions and the white and silver of the gulls. Such a multitude, alike in the number of individuals and in the variety of species, exceeded anything that I had seen or expected. Alas, so small had been my hopes that my camera, usually a constant companion, had been left behind.

Many times since then, and at all seasons, I have made a pilgrimage to this stretch of coast, and seldom without reward. My wife and I, some fortnight later, tried to catch the high tide and get some pictures. It was not unsuccessful. Knots and Godwits, Oystercatchers and a few Sanderlings were still there at the flood; but the mass of gulls was sadly diminished; and many of the others had passed on. And the weather was sadly changed—a bitterly cold south-wester, a grey dull sky and a leaden sea. We endured, and even took a few photographs; but after the wonders of September the October flocks were mildly disappointing.

In the winter the big assemblies are shorn of their variety. Oystercatchers are there in numbers; Black-heads, Herring Gulls and a few Great Black-backs; some Dunlin, a bunch or two of Redshank and an occasional Curlew; and usually a string of Black Duck out on the water. But the sandhills are more interesting than the

shore, as I discovered one Sunday in February when a mistaken entry in my diary had taken me out to preach at a church where I was not expected. There was time to slip down the coast in the car and see if the Shelduck had yet come in to the pools in the dunes. There were no Shelduck; but on the foreshore several dead Scoter drakes, and behind the hills three or four more, and one or two live birds. One of these got up as we approached and flew overhead to the sea: another lay still on the sand, let us approach within ten yards and then waddled clumsily to the water and swam leisurely round the little lagoon. Others were on a larger lake near by; all of them adult drakes, and all evidently sickly. The corpses showed no very plain evidence of oil: the breast-feathers were slightly matted but not clogged or saturated. The cause of their trouble was beyond my powers of diagnosis; but their distress enabled me to add a new species to my list of photographs.

March, like September, sees the shore fully occupied and is a month of almost supreme interest for the watcher; for in addition to the vast flocks of migrant waders that muster at the high tide, he can study the break-up of the winter parties of residents into couples, and note their return to the breeding-quarters in the sandhills. On the 19th of the month, when the tide was high at noon, I was able to get away for a few hours, and note the signs of spring. Along the water-line was a great assembly of Godwits, several thousand strong, sitting, as their custom is, on the very edge of the shallows. With them were many Knots, a few Redshank, and some smaller birds, probably Dunlin. Inshore was a crowd of gulls, mainly Herring, with a few Lesser Black-backs, the first I had seen that season, and still fewer Black-heads. Almost at the foot of

the dunes were little bunches of Ringed Plover. Ten days earlier they had been gathered in a great pack: now they were chiefly in couples or triplets; and the cock birds were courting vigorously, fanning out the tail, lowering the neck to the horizontal, and running with a curious crouching gait round their would-be mates. The hens were still coy, rivals were numerous, and the whole beach was a-flicker with flights and pursuits.

In the dunes the Black-heads were very noisy: we had interrupted their search for future homes, and they resented our intrusion. A flock of a dozen Shelducks had already come in, and though keeping company on the pools split up when disturbed into pairs. A couple of Wild Duck and a couple of Teal were with them. One or two pairs of Oystercatchers were strolling sedately about their territories, looking strangely larger here than they do on the sands. Redshanks were very busy and very vocal, jerkily concerned with eligible tufts of herbage. Lapwings were securely settled, and on one bit of flat marsh we found five circular scrapes, the work of a single pair, and one of them lined with a few stalks of marram. There were now no Black Duck, except mangled corpses, and not yet, of course, any Terns. But spring was obviously on the way.

The previous night had seen the highest tide of the month; and under the sandhills the shore was strewn thick with its flotsam. High-water mark has always had a strong fascination for me ever since the days when I spent a month's convalescence in my ninth year at Brighton, and gave up collecting bus tickets in favour of seaweeds. One of the earliest episodes of my career as an ornithologist was a glorious and pungent afternoon spent over the skull of a decomposed Black-head, when, so my mother declares, I returned home rather green of complexion, and being

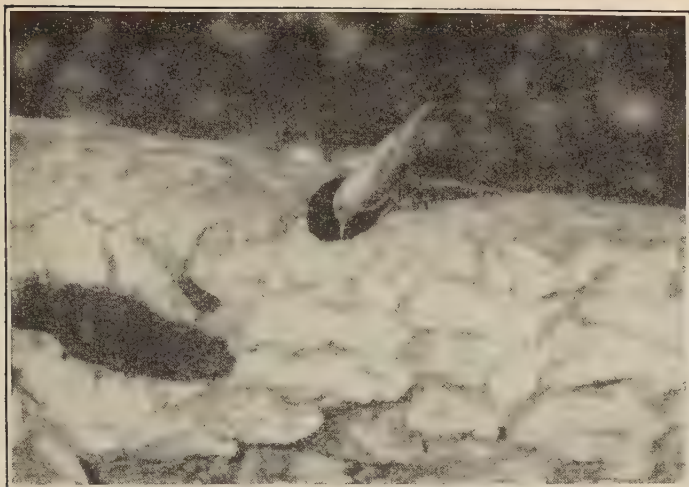
offered tea asked if I might go off to bed. Certainly the attraction remains. That queer museum where one may find almost anything human or marine, molluscos or avian, is a never-failing source of interest; and in these days off a great seaport the debris bears eloquent testimony to the horrors of the oil menace. That afternoon in the course of a half-mile stroll we counted twenty Scoter drakes and eight ducks, two Velvet Scoters, cock and hen, three Guillemots, a Razorbill, a Heron, three Herring Gulls, a young Common Gull and a young Greater Black-backed, all sufficiently fresh to be identifiable. The gulls and perhaps the Heron may have been victims of a scoundrel with a gun; for the gulls I at least shall not mourn. The rest are victims of refuse oil, a melancholy sample of the havoc that goes on round our coasts, and a silent protest against man's carelessness and greed.

CHAPTER X

AN INFANT ASSASSIN

SECOND visits, like other sequels, are in their very nature a disappointment. The first impression of a new experience has about it a clean-cut and vivid perfection which no repetition can ever again recapture for us. Greatest and least alike, we can only taste life's gifts in their full flavour once. Love and the presence of death, the crown of joy and of terror, each can be won and worn for a day, and thereafter—we have worn them. How wonderful they are, those incunabula of our history! How carefully we treasure them, and how wisely guard against the infringement of their uniqueness! If we could tell each one of us the riches which have thus come new-minted to the treasure-house of our hearts we should reveal, more clearly than by aught else, the quality of our characters. For such possessions are formative: we gain them and are changed. Memory, that selective artist of the soul, takes the raw material of an event, enhances one element and suppresses another, until the clay of earth is transmuted into faery gold. Heaven alone can show me a scene so fair as my first picture of Tintern seen all unexpected as I swung round the corner of a wood on its enshrining hills. No Morpho of the Amazons was ever half so bright as the blue butterfly that my old nurse caught for me in Cheshire one summer when I had spent many hours chasing the cabbage whites in Kensington Gardens. My first—and only—century,

NUTHATCH AT NEST



GREEN WOODPECKER AT NEST





YOUNG CUCKOO EJECTING REDSTARTS

my first—and by no means only—sermon, my first sight of the Alps, the scream of my first shell, my first baby, my first book—what a miscellaneous collection it is! And yet each has the same attribute: vivid in their happening, they have become more vivid with the years. Almost such pictures tempt us to the cult of Athens, and the constant search for “some new thing,” until we remind ourselves that the epicure in novelty is of all forms of lecher the most perverted. For the delight in first impressions belongs to the young, to those who can keep alive the faculty for spontaneous and happy wonder, to those who receive impressions but never collect them. As soon as we begin to pander to our appetites, to pursue sensations like a connoisseur instead of enjoying them like a child, we have fallen into sin. Novelty may be the spice of life: one does not live on spices.

Yet my second visit to Holland was an exception: the time of it was not too happily chosen, and we only managed a single day in Texel. But the dunes and the Naardermeer were far more beautiful than I had remembered: the birds, and particularly a Green Woodpecker and a Nuthatch in the garden at Lindenheufel, were fascinating as ever; and the visit had a climax which would have made any season memorable.

It was by chance, a very happy chance, that we found it, the Cuckoo's egg in the Redstart's nest—the Cuckoo's egg so splendidly suitable for observation and for photography. I had been picturing a Godwit in a tent far away on the dunes on Saturday, May 16th, and being Saturday Leen Bakker stored the hide away in an old shooting-hut, that would otherwise have gone unvisited; and when he entered put off the mother bird from her clutch. The hut was locked up and deserted: a few rough chairs, a table,

some cases and old coops were its furniture; and air was admitted through a circular opening some six inches in diameter. By this way the bird had entered; by it she had brought a great pile of moss to cover the top of a crate, and the grass stems and feathers which formed the deep cup in its centre. By it too the mother Cuckoo must have come to deposit her brown and speckled egg among the blue treasures of its foster-parent. The discovery of that egg was an accident also. Leen had merely noted the nest. Next day when he took us to see it, the others satisfied themselves with reaching up and touching its contents. It was too high for an easy inspection, and to them Redstarts' nests were among the most familiar. I was taller and more inquisitive. For until I went to Holland my knowledge of Redstarts had been almost confined to a single nest found in my early school-days on a memorable excursion when as a new boy of no repute I achieved a sudden fame by discovering the gleaming eggs in a cranny of a great ash-trunk. So I was not prepared to touch alone; but looked in, saw, and told what I had seen. Afterwards there was an awful moment when I was tempted traitorously to wish that I had kept my knowledge to myself; but that shall be told in its season.

There they lay in the deep cup so neatly twined with dry grass and feathers, the six Redstarts and their larger and unmistakable companion. It was an exciting moment when we all verified my claim. Doubly exciting indeed; for the authorities have declared that the Cuckoo removes one of the rival eggs to make room for its own, and to find six others with it was to cast doubt upon the universal truth of their statements; for a clutch of seven would be highly unusual for a bird that usually lays five. And eggs have a way of hatching, and in eleven days at the outside a young

Cuckoo would be born, and the oft-observed but still disputed drama of its murderous activities might with due care be re-enacted before our eyes.

It was indeed this hope which made the find so absorbing. My host had just been assailed with brutal and wholly unjust violence by a veteran French ornithologist who had roundly denounced not only Jenner and Mrs. Blackburn, but all their successors, for having created a legend and propagated it by fraudulent evidence and faked photographs. Only the day before I had been reading the documents of the controversy and the manuscript of M. Burdet's answer to M. Raspail. And here before our eyes was the possibility of further testimony, and under conditions almost ideal. True, we could not film or photograph the tragedy within the hut: short of unroofing it, the light could not be sufficient. But the nest was not built in a crevice, but laid flat upon a level surface of boarding. Nothing could be easier than to slide under it a sheet of stout cardboard, lift the whole moss-heap upon it, and carry it out into the day, replacing it in its exact position and wholly undisturbed when the pictures were complete. And for me, whose Cuckoos' eggs had been few and far between, here was the chance of a lifetime. To such a possibility all else must be sacrificed. We would watch and wait hourly for the moment of destiny.

How irritating that wait proved! We had no means of reckoning when the birth would occur, and the daily reports were monotonously uninteresting. Like other babes of greater fame, the little wretch was in no hurry to appear. We hung like physicians over the couch, noting such signs of gloss upon the shell as predict a speedy delivery. But for a long week nothing happened.

That week did not matter. We were in the dunes

daily, and a visit to the hut was merely an easy incident in the day's programme. But from the 24th onwards we had plans which would take us to Texel; and for my part I dreaded their destruction. Still the Cuckoo must come first; and if on Monday there was no news we might safely depart, knowing that a telegram would bring us back in time; for until he is at least a day old Master Cuckoo remains innocent of crime. On the 25th we were to hear news by breakfast. We were all ready for our journey, and I was feverish to be off. Leen Bakker arrived with his bulletin. Not for the first time I cursed my ignorance of Dutch, and tried to guess his message from his manner and my host's receiving of the news. "The egg is chipped," said M. Burdet, "we can't go." I hardly knew whether to weep or rejoice; but all along I had realised that one or other of my hopes would have to be sacrificed.

So, rather reluctantly, I unpacked my kit, and set out to console myself in a tent at a Little Owl's nest, while my companions went off to the Cuckoo. At 10.30 a note arrived to say that the youngster had been hatched and was lying helplessly among the hard shells of the Redstarts' eggs. I tramped off to the hut at noon, and arrived in time to take a first picture of the newly-born. Very tiny and weak he looked—a little, bald, blind blob of flesh of a bright orange-pink or tan colour, not unlike the first hue of a human infant, but heavier in shade than most baby birds. His complexion and size were a surprise to me. I had expected him to be blackish and shiny, and larger and more vigorous. Surely M. Raspail must be right: so frail a creature could barely lift his head and gape for food, let alone throw out eggs almost as bulky as himself. We weighed him, and he scaled four grammes: certainly there could be no ejection yet awhile. Indeed I half

believed that he must have been hatched prematurely, for the hut was as hot as an incubator, and that after all he would die and disappoint us. For I forgot how few hours he had lived, and how small was the egg that had imprisoned him. However, our plans had been scrapped, and like our betters we could only "wait and see."

Next day I did not visit him: the Owl was horribly elusive. But M. Burdet at lunch-time was depressed. The Cuckoo was utterly inactive, and the Redstarts were still in the egg. We might risk a day's absence; for eggs can be replaced if thrown out, and we could return in five hours when necessary. And the Cuckoo might wait two or three days. So that afternoon we left. The story of our going must be left untold. Suffice it that we were away exactly twenty-four hours. For that evening, May 26th, five of the six Redstart eggs hatched; and next day at noon the crisis began. Soon after lunch a telephone call came through to say that already the egg and a chick had been ejected. Instructions were given to replace them; and before night we were back at Overveen, in the hope that an early start next morning might yet bring us to the scene in time. Texel might after all not have been left in vain; and in any case, though it had rained heavily all day, I had revisited the beloved island and spent three hours picturing the Avocet. Yet while I developed my photographs, I could not believe that we should bring off the double event. Surely when the young Cuckoo had tasted power he would not rest till his task was finished: surely we should find five corpses in the cold next morning. If so, would it be possible to introduce other victims? I knew of three Redstarts' nests due to hatch: could we fairly test our assassin upon their contents? Or would this be the

very "truquage" of which my host had been so wantonly accused?

When next day the rain still came down pitilessly and the light seemed impossibly bad, my hopes disappeared. After all our adventures we were to fail. On such a day picture-making was impossible. We had planned to have news at eight: no news came: the outlook was as dismal as the weather.

And then at their seeming worst, things took a turn. The storm blew itself out: the clouds broke; and by ten we were in sunshine. One last trial awaited us. The car which had done its eighty kilometres in the teeth of the gale the night before refused to start, and for an endless half-hour Heinrich laboured at it in vain. Fortunately he knows his job, knows it inside out, and by 10.30 a triumphant hooting announced his success. We might still be in time.

And on reaching our goal what a change! The Cuckoo had grown enormously. He now scaled eleven grammes, and crowded up the whole cup of the nest. His complexion had altered—glabrous black on head and arms, and a livid plum-colour on the square and hollowed saddle of his back; his zygodactyl feet on slim but sturdy legs; his wings muscular and pimpled; his neck long and tense, fitted for the part it has to play; his eyes closed, his orange mouth constantly agape: he looked an athlete and a ruffian. With him were three newly-born Redstarts and the unhatched egg, presumably addled; and outside the nest, and some inches from its rim, two little bodies, one quite dead, the other still faintly moving, mute witnesses of the expected tragedy. The young assassin was evidently at work and would continue his operations. Our wildest hopes, so hard held, were to be fulfilled.

Hurriedly the preparations were made: the nest was

transported out of doors, the cinema camera erected and focussed, and my less cumbrous apparatus set up by its side. But before we had finished, the young Cuckoo had begun his part. He was stirring himself about the nest, shouldering out of the way his tiny companions, crushing them against its sides and burrowing among them until he lay, a great square bulk, over the whole bottom of the cavity with little Redstarts squeezed out over his edges. Finally, one of them got fairly upon Master Cuckoo's back; and then the drama began. First he squares his shoulders, pressing back the blades so as to keep his victim from slipping forwards, and flexing back the wings like arms to grip the sides of the nest behind the small of his back. Meanwhile the neck is bent sharply downwards, the head and beak continuing the line, the latter pressing on the bottom of the nest close in front of his belly: this rigid shaft is to serve as the elevator, when once his prey has been securely cradled in the hollow of the back and fenced in by the shoulders and wings. At the same time the legs are splayed wide apart, each foot being thrust firmly against the side of the nest well in front of the head and beak. The creature thus turns himself into a sort of three-legged chair—his legs and neck being its feet, his wings its arms, his shoulders its back. This is the first position; and the unhappy chick or egg once secured on the chair has little chance of escape. Then when all is firm the action develops. The Cuckoo presses back with his legs, so that his blunt-pointed stern is kept tight against the wall of the nest. Then his head and neck are thrust into the perpendicular, the beak at first against the floor of the nest, the root of the neck lifted and held at a sharp angle to the back. The chair is thus slanted forwards, its wretched occupant being prisoned between the wall of its home and the raised shoulders of its murderer. Now the whole begins to rise,

the wings of the Cuckoo gripping the lip of the nest and the victim being steered upwards between them. It is a magnificent gymnastic achievement, every fibre of the blind young culprit being tense and active. For now the depth of the nest is too great for his neck to get leverage from its bottom: he must do the final heave without its support. So keeping the position of the "Pelican in its piety," with head pointing down his breast, he lifts the whole chair upwards and outwards until at last the rim of the nest is passed, and he flattens his back against it, still grasping it with his wings, and flings his burden triumphantly over it, to slide to its doom down the slope outside. For a long moment the Cuckoo stands palpitating, to make sure that the unseen event has actually taken place. Then his effort relaxes, the neck sinks, the back flattens, and in place of a demon behold a baby bird lying apparently quite helpless and pathetically opening its beak for the food that does not come.

We had interrupted our preparations while this first drama was taking place. Now all must be got ready; for there are still two youngsters and an egg to be disposed of; and to take him at work will show more than pages of description. He did not keep us long. While we focussed he rested, but after the first moments in evident discontent. Like the Romans, his only idea of peace was solitude, and his home was not his own until he had it to himself. Round it he began to work his way, ruthless of what he might crush, and every now and then lowering his beak and testing the possibility of another ejection. At last his object was achieved: the egg, thrust to one side by his motion, rolled over on to his back and rested in the broad hollow between hips and shoulders. It was the psychological moment. The process already described could begin again; and begin it did without delay. Down goes

the beak, seeking for a stay below the belly: back go the wings, feeling after the embrace of the egg and propping it between them and the rising shoulders. Wedged against the lip of the nest, the egg gradually rises though the assassin keeps his tail well down until his hands can grip the rim behind his back. Then, when the trap is complete, he rises; the egg, pressed up from below and guided by wings and neck, sticks a moment under the lip of the cavity, then passes it and hangs upon its edge. Savagely those ruthless shoulders and straining wings do their work; convulsively the little athlete braces himself backward; with a shuddering thrust he pushes the egg clear: it is outside the nest, well beyond hope of return, and only by the accident of a comparatively level patch on its edge is it saved, for a moment, from rolling far away. Meanwhile the Cuckoo, whose whole action since the spasm began has taken less than a minute, stays leaning backwards for long enough to allow me to re-focus and take a third exposure: then, satisfied that his load has dropped off, he sinks back and for a quarter of an hour lies prostrate, exhausted, helpless. No one, seeing him so, would credit the demonic energy which he has just put forth, or believe that this shapeless lump of blind babyhood could be capable of so monstrous an achievement.

But rest is not for long. Soon he gapes for food: it doesn't come, and he begins to stir uneasily. There are still two young Redstarts in the nest—tiny little chaps with golden-pink flesh and little tufts of dark down on head and shoulders. With this huge and lumbering foster-brother constantly fidgeting and crushing them against the walls, their home is by no means a happy one. They lie precariously on its edges, half buried beneath the stranger, their little mouths gaping up when he moves in the wistful hope that their mother will fill them. And all the while

the Cuckoo is getting lower in the nest: now he lies flat on its bottom, the ominous hollow in his back open to receive a victim. And still he turns round, his wings held out and seeming to clutch his comrades and thrust them to the edge of the pit. Suddenly with a wriggle he has them both lying across his back, and, aware that his moment has come, stoops his head for their slaughter. It is the fatal commencement: the spasm once started goes forward as before. There is a moment when the two little nurslings, cradled in that horrible embrace, seem to be slipping away: one of them nearly, oh, so nearly slides down from the chair of doom through the gap between the arms and the edge of the nest over the murderer's left hip. But before he does so the clutching wings, with the bastard-wing acting like a thumb, have found the rim of the cup, and both babies are imprisoned beyond hope of escape. For a moment there has been a confused struggle, the Cuckoo putting in some masterly arm-work, when his right wing held rigid as a bar supported the weight of both Redstarts and swept backwards till it gripped the wall behind them. Now all is ordered: the double burden is lifted clear, and flung with a jerk of neck and shoulders into the outer world. The egg, already precariously balanced, is dislodged: one baby hangs head downwards unable to lift itself; the other slides helplessly down the slope. The Cuckoo stands a moment rigid and triumphant, long enough for a final plate to be exposed; then sinks back to lonely enjoyment of its reward.

It was an amazing drama. Long ago I had read Jenner's original announcement of it and Mrs. Blackburn's detailed description and Hudson's ingenious and exact explanation of its motive and course. To see it was the more wonderful on that account. The actions were as had been told: in a sense it was just what one expected. But what a world of unknown energies and unsolved problems was revealed

by the uncanny skill of the actual performance. As a test-case in psychological interpretation it stands out unrivalled. Most of us have been brought up to explain it in terms of our own processes, to read back into the preliminary wriggles and flattening of itself at the bottom of the nest a diabolical design to manœuvre its rivals on to its back, a design which is then executed with deliberate foresight of means and end. Then we reacted against ascribing developed intelligence to a blind bald baby, and plunged into the mode of the behaviourists. The whole action was reflex. Sensitiveness of skin makes the Cuckoo writhe away from contact. Super-sensitiveness on the hollow of the back produces a kind of seizure. The effort to throw off the incubus is just a standardised and mechanical routine. There is no mind, hardly indeed any consciousness, in it at all.

And seeing it what are we to say? To me at least the spectacle raised grave doubts of the thesis of sensitive skin and an itch to be left untouched. The Cuckoo at all stages of its growth is a restless nestling, floundering about in the nest, shifting from side to side, noisy and impatient. Its earlier movements seemed the mere irritation of the unfed: its weight squeezes out its fellow-inmates and secures for itself possession of the middle and lowest part of the nest. It is when a victim rolls on to its back that the whole character of the action changes. Before it was casual, and nothing gave any sign of what was to come. At once the scene is transformed: seizure is not too strong a word: the creature becomes ruthless and demonic. But it is no blind spasm. Not only are the actions perfectly co-ordinated, but they are carried out with flexibility and adjustment to circumstances. He can gauge the height of the nest to a nicety: he can, and does, select the lowest side of it, and steer his load towards it. Three times running he

hoisted the victim to the one part of his home from which it could be most easily ejected ; each time he selected the same spot, though at the start he was not, in fact, suitably placed for it. No doubt it is a question of delicate appreciation of gravity ; the nest slopes a little and he works round to the easiest place. But how purposive the whole thing looks : how skilful, how intelligent.

Of course we are here in a world where talk about intellect is misplaced, and where instinct is a question-begging word, the world of activities undifferentiable by our analysis, the world of lives whose motive-power does not fall easily into our categories. We in whom intellect is specialised can as adults discriminate easily between mental and instinctive processes : reason and intuition seem contrasted : we note the difference between them and fail to realise their common origin. In our own infancy and later on in the more elemental experiences of life the processes of the self cannot be so readily labelled. There is purpose, but it is sensed rather than rationalised ; an end in view, but no perception of the logic of the steps towards it ; an energy conscious, but not self-conscious. In our case we can no more keep our intellects from participating in such activities than we can forgo the evidence of our sight and hearing. We cannot, therefore, find in our own experience exact parallels to the processes of other orders of life. But we can see enough to realise that here in ourselves is the fully evolved form of what is originally unspecialised. A flock of Waders manœuvring over the mud-flats or of Starlings in their evening flight display faculties of sympathetic co-operation which exist in us so overlaid by our dependence upon special sense-contacts as to be little understood and often ignored. Migrants from the tropics, Auks and Penguins on the ocean, find their

way with a skill which we have sacrificed for supremacy in mechanical devices. Insects are sensitive to light and to ultra-violet rays through the whole skin, a heritage which we have apparently forgone. The young Cuckoo is not intelligent; nor is it an automaton. It is just a very finished performer on the level where mind has not been developed up to the range of conscious thought, the level where the power of adaptation to circumstance is small, and where habit is tyrannous. Like the spider it has its code, exact, elaborate, as much a part of its constitution as the form of its body or the sequence of its plumages. How has it been learned, if learned at all? That we can answer only when we discover how the unicellular organism gave rise to the multicellular, how the bees co-operate in the hive, how the *Ammophila* knows the anatomy of a caterpillar's ganglia, how life has advanced until a human being can begin to examine the steps by which his power to ask questions has been reached. When we understand ourselves perhaps we shall understand the young Cuckoo. Are we to begin the quest with *Homo sapiens* or with the *Amœba*?

Be that as it may the facts are plain enough. It is M. Raspail, with his dogma of the helplessness of the young Cuckoo and his theory of its mother's care for her babe, who deals in legends. We have seen and pictured once more what so many others have described, the parasite without help and within three days of its birth ridding itself of rivals and securing the sole attention of the foster-parents by the destruction of their offspring. It was an additional satisfaction that in this case it was almost a bloodless tragedy: two other Redstarts had young broods in the neighbourhood and the ejected babies were safely boarded out with them. And for me it was a wonderful ending to my second visit to Holland and Lindenheufel.

CHAPTER XI

THE KINDERGARTEN

IN 1926 North Wales and the Lakes had been gifts unexpected and unearned. The event of my summer was once again to be a visit to Holland, to the Burdets' home at Overveen, to the dunes of Bloemendaal, and to the flats of the Muy and the Waal en Burg. Most fortunately as it proved, May was an impossible month; I was in residence. In any case June would have been my choice; for the birds that were specially in mind, the Harriers and the Oriole, would be more easily secured then, and the earlier species would be hatching out. Had we planned to go before June the General Strike would certainly have prevented it. As it was, we were uncertain until almost the eve of our departure. Indeed had I been alone it is likely that the visit would not have taken place. The strike and the conclusion of a long and heavy piece of writing had left me tired and empty, with not enough energy to desire a move, anxious rather to go to sleep than to face a journey. It is a queer habit of mine to be horribly afraid of the small details of travel. Trains are pleasant places if only because there are no telephones. The sea is kind to me: I love it and it gives me immunity from its usual unpleasantness. But luggage, and porters, and Customs, and tips, and foreign places, and a strange language—these things fill me with a nameless and quite unreasonable terror. If it had not been that Mr. and Mrs. Coward



YOUNG CORMORANTS IN NEST



GOLDEN ORIOLES AT NEST



STORKS AND NEST. *The male clappering*



STONECHAT AT NEST

were going with me, and that I had been working at problems of bird-instinct, I should have "funked"—and missed the best month of my life's birding.

"I've never made a friend before of a man whom I had first called a liar"—that is Mr. Coward's account of the beginning of our comradeship. It was a venial insult, a kindly suggestion in a review of my bird book that I knew more about the subject than I admitted; and it had even more pleasant sequels. He wanted to visit Holland: I suggested that we should go together: Burdet had long hoped to meet him: the whole arrangements went without a hitch. I think and believe that he enjoyed it, and learned nearly as much from it as I did from him. More delightful companions man never had; but if he ever reviews another book of mine, he will withdraw his remarks about my knowledge.

The second reason for my going was more relevant to this chapter. My work had led me into the vexed problems of mental evolution, into the heat of the conflict between the animists and the naturalists. Like most amateurs brought up on the romantic literature of animal story-books, I had half-unconsciously interpreted the behaviour of birds and beasts sentimentally, in the fashion of the *Jungle Book* or of *Lobo* and *Redruff*. For years I had been vaguely aware that this was mistaken, vaguely dissatisfied with the "common sense" of Professor McDougall, vaguely convinced that the easy philosophy for which the body is the piano and the mind the musician would not do. But it was not till I became involved in the work of Mr. Eliot Howard and of Professor Lloyd Morgan that I realised both the extent of my error and the importance of correcting it. This is not the place to discuss the mysteries of comparative psychology, or to defend the

hypothesis of Emergent Evolution. But for any student of mankind it must be evident that until we know far more about the physics and the "psychics" of animal behaviour we shall misinterpret or neglect the fundamental qualities of our heritage. The subtleties of the neural structure and the mental processes which condition our responses to our environment and to one another can hardly be investigated unless we can trace their origins in the equipment of simpler forms of life. What is the nature of instinct? Is there such a thing as racial memory? What is the meaning of the "group mind"? These are questions that cannot be answered without reference to the source and development of nerves and brain and of the psychic events associated with them. Part of the work must wait for the students of bio-chemistry and bio-physics; that belongs to the experts. Part must draw its material from observation, from a faithful account of the activities of living things: there even the amateur, provided he be accurate, might help. At any rate, for one who had been quick to assume in his bird-friends emotions and plans similar to his own, it was important to repeat experiences which might well have been unconsciously coloured by the personal equation. To go in June would be to get opportunities for watching newly-hatched chicks in the critical period of their first steps in life. If the results were not of very much importance, the month was at least singularly rich in memories and pictures.

In view of previous visits, it seemed hardly likely that many new birds would come my way. Avocets, Godwits, Ruffs, Black Terns, the familiar victims of the Englishman in Holland, were already well known to me. Others, like the Kentish Plover, would be over. Some, like the Oriole, the Stone Curlew and the Stork, were highly precarious.

To be frank, I expected that for photography the tour would be a failure. "Blessed is he who expecteth nothing, for he shall be gloriously surprised." The event falsified my fears. Every bird that I had dreamed of finding offered itself to me. In twenty-one days of photography I took pictures of the Kentish Plover, Snipe, Common Gull, Skylark, Shoveller, Avocet, Reeve, Black and Common Terns, Kestrel, Montagu's Harrier and Long-eared Owl, Stonechat, the first to nest in the island—and I found the nest myself!—and young Cuckoo fed by a Meadow Pipit: these in Texel. On the dunes I took Stone Curlew, Redstart, Wood Wren, Willow Wren, Blue Tit and Golden Oriole, this last a real triumph, for the nest was high up in a slender birch-tree; at a farm near Leyden a pair of Storks; and at Lekkerkerke beyond Rotterdam Cormorants nesting in the trees round a little lake, ghoulish and gruesome to sight and smell. Mr. Coward has told the story of our adventures in his recent book, and I will not venture to repeat it, but will confine myself to the babies.

Texel was alive with them: of that a very few hours gave evidence. Though many clutches of Redshanks and Oystercatchers, Avocets and Reeves were still unhatched, the majority of the waders were out. Lying up one could watch the anxious parents gradually drawing nearer to the place where their charges lay hidden, and see here and there a tiny thing bobbing up for a moment in the grass. The gullery swarmed with youngsters in spite of the fact that some ten thousand eggs had been gathered from it. In the Muy the Herons were almost flying, the Wild Duck had big broods, and the Shelduck were going about in pairs, having apparently finished their nesting. The domestic arrangements of the Bergeend are worth fuller study than they have received. In February flocks of them

can be seen off the coast: slob-lands like the sands of Dee are full of them. Thence late in March they repair to the dunes, and the hen goes into retirement in her burrow, while the drakes stand about in the marsh-land, making occasional expeditions to the sea. When the eggs hatch, the young are taken to the water, to the nearest ditch or pond. One can see the families disporting themselves for a day or two in sheltered havens like the delicious pool called Abraham's Bosom hidden away among the pines of Holkham. And then after their first training in the nursery they make for the sea, and the several broods join forces under the charge of a single governess. You can on rare occasions see great bunches of them close inshore with an old bird keeping watch over their adventures. Then it is that the parents reunite, neglecting the babies now out of their care and keeping a belated honeymoon together while they moult. It is all curiously unlike the habits of other ducks, where the drake takes himself off when incubation has begun; leaves his mate to bring up the family, and tend them through the summer; goes into eclipse, and in the safety of his russet dress sheds his quills and becomes flightless. Plainly the Shelduck with its single moult and similarly coloured sexes stands nearer to the geese than to the other ducks where the males have developed a double moult and a gaudy livery worn for half the year.

Of babies my chief opportunities for study were with Terns and Hawks, both of which are admirable subjects. They are born in possession of their faculties, unlike the young of Passerines or Pigeons; but they stay in the nest or its neighbourhood longer than do baby waders or game-birds. To watch a nest of thrushes or finches is attractive enough: no mother bird can be anything but delightful,



BLACK TERNS. *Cock bringing food to mate*



BLACK TERN AND YOUNG. *Chick 1 day old*

1. SPOONBILL



2. MONTAGU'S HARRIER



3. LITTLE OWLS



4. KESTRELS



and some points of her behaviour, the distribution of food and the method of cleaning the nest, are of interest. But the young develop so slowly that the stages of their progress and the first signs of conscious mind are hard to discriminate. And those that leave the nest at once give the student little opportunity; for the parents call the young away and their actions are lost to view from his hide. With the Terns the young stay in the hollow for some forty-eight hours and every movement is visible; and the Hawks are at home till almost fully fledged.

My Terns were of two species, Common and Black; and they had laid within a few yards of one another on the swampy meadow intersected at intervals of ten yards by shallow parallel ditches, and lying to the south-west of the cross-roads that mark the centre of the Waal en Burg. Here the Black Terns nest regularly—a dozen pairs perhaps—depositing two or three eggs on the sea-pink. And this year a few Commons from the main colony on the Start had joined them.

I spent an afternoon with the rarer bird on June 4th, getting some jolly pictures of them as they alighted, and twice succeeding in taking the pair together. Their plumage puzzled me. The books, or those at my disposal, are neither complete nor accurate; for they represent the sexes as alike, with the crown, throat and chest black, whereas very many, whether males or females, have pale cheeks and chins and necks. At this nest the sitting bird was the darker: apart from white flecks at the gape, the throat and breast were very deep grey. The other, a shy creature who sat some ten yards off and rarely visited the nest, was paler, the throat being almost pure white. Possibly the shy one was the hen; for many times I have found cock Terns the first to return. But in any case the pair exactly

reversed the behaviour of those I had studied two years before; for then the pale bird was fearless, and the dark one hardly sat at all.

It was not until the 10th and 11th that hatching began, though on the 9th we had found one youngster in the neighbourhood half-fledged. In the morning at 8.30 one of the three eggs had hatched: I set up the tent, but had an appointment with the Harrier and had to leave it, after photographing the tiny new-comer. By 2.30, when I returned, a second youngster was out and the two were crouched together in the little hollow. The parents were busy with them, the dark-breasted bird doing most of the brooding and the other arriving occasionally with food, either small fish or larvæ of the dragon-fly or dark objects which I took to be tadpoles. One chick, the elder, was a little restless, wandering round his parent and making excursions of a few inches into the green. They were a placid family, fearless and happy; and I spent a couple of hours very pleasantly without seeing anything of special interest. The third egg was unhatched, and I began to suspect that it was infertile.

Next day I returned in the afternoon to the tent and found the two youngsters still in the nest, but very much more lively. Feeding was going on, and little cries of eagerness greeted the old birds on their visits. After half an hour the parents stopped coming to the hollow, and one of the babies wandered off into the grass away from the hide. Soon the other followed, disappearing into the stiff stems of the thrift. The old birds were hovering about, one of them very low over the little drain through the meadow some six yards away, and the other to the left on its edge. I contemplated the nest for some minutes, and then noticed that the nearer adult was in a state of

excitement, plunging into the reeds, bustling up and down, making little darts apparently at something on the water, and uttering a variety of short shrill cries. I was afraid that there was trouble, left the tent, and walking with great care in case the chicks were lying hid came to the ditch. There among the reed-stems floating happily was the baby. He had found his way across the jungle, and was taking his first bathe. And a few yards further down, where the second old bird had been, was his brother, similarly occupied. Judging by the absence of young birds in the neighbourhood, and by the situation of the nests in the Naardermeer, I suspect that the Black Tern's infancy is almost entirely spent on the water; and in a day or two he probably learns to supplement his rations of fish and tadpoles by insect-food collected from the reed-stems.

That same morning after a visit to the Muy I had set up a second tent at a Common Tern's nest in the same field. At eleven o'clock when I arrived one young bird was already hatched and his down had just dried, the other egg was picked. One parent, which when I saw them together I judged by his shape and by the blacker tip to his bill to be the cock, was on guard, but not actually brooding. At 11.15 the convulsive wriggles of its inmate split the eggshell into halves and the tiny bedraggled occupant crawled out into the air. The cock descended, picked up the top half of the shell and carried it away, but otherwise paid no attention. Two minutes later he came back and sat covering the baby and the piece of eggshell. Meanwhile the older nestling had been toddling feebly round his home, and when his father was settled came round and stood before him. Then followed an interesting scene. The cock lowered his bill, and the baby picked at it: the old bird nuzzled his beak, and I think that a drop of fluid

passed from father to son. This aroused the pecking instinct, and the infant began to practise first on a grass-stalk and then on his parent's feathers. The old bird stood up over the hollow, making room for him to come in; but he refused to respond, wandered off, and squatted among the thrift a foot away. In a minute or two, at 11.20 to be precise, the cock flew off, leaving his charges basking in the sun. He was away ten minutes, and had perhaps visited the coast; for on his return was a silvery fish in his beak, a tiny thing indeed but nearly two inches long and a substantial meal for a new-born baby. He dropped with it at the nest; but the younger chick was hardly dry and not yet ready for food: so spying the truant he waddled away to him and presented the offering, which was seized and swallowed with avidity. Having begun to provide for his family he determined to do it thoroughly, and this time was only away five minutes. The second fish went the way of the first, and the fisherman changed his rôle for that of nurse. He had been sitting some ten minutes when his wife arrived, alighting close alongside and standing behind him. I have seen hen Terns push their mates from the nest, nudging them off it with their beaks; but this one needed no such hint. He slipped on to the wing, and she promptly took his place, covering one young bird and with the other crouched drowsily beside her. As she sat she kept clucking to him—tuk-tuk-tuk-tk-tk—with occasionally a higher note; but his first meal was heavy in him, and he paid no attention to her blandishments. Even when his father returned with a small dark capture, though he pecked at it and even took it in his beak, he let it drop and made no effort to recover it; and when the old bird picked it up and held it out to him, he looked at it for nearly a minute, turned round, walked away, squatted down by his mother's



SHOVELLER AND NEST



KENTISH PLOVER AND NEST



LONG-EARED OWL AND YOUNG

side and went to sleep. Ten minutes later he roused himself sufficiently to crawl beneath her feathers and join his brother.

With the Hawks I was singularly fortunate, though results were only obtained after long and patient waiting. My chief hope in visiting Texel in June was that at last I might get a chance of picturing Montagu's Harrier. I had known both birds and nests for years. One of my earliest recollections of Wicken, when I used to visit it in my moth-hunting days, is of a glimpse of the Ring-tail circling over the fen, and later in the year of one of her brood, looking as red as a cock Kestrel in the sunlight. And in the Broads I had been allowed to see and photograph the eggs, and once when sailing in July had been shown a couple of families of youngsters nearly full-fledged. In Holland on my first visit there had been two nests, one in the Muy and the other at Hoorn; but the hens had only just laid, and I was warned that it was not safe to put up a tent.

So my first question was for them when we got to the preserve, and I was delighted to hear that there were three nests at the far end of the Muy and within a quarter of a mile of one another. And near by were two pairs of Kestrels, nesting as they do in Texel on the ground among the densest scrub. I was, I confess it, eager to begin at once: had I been left to myself, my tent would have been pitched straight away, and it was annoying to be warned that it was too early. But unhappily a fellow-countryman with a zeal that outran his discretion had visited the island at Whitsuntide, and tried to photograph a Harrier whose clutch was just completed, with the result that she had deserted her eggs. So if I wished to retrieve the good name of my country I must be patient. Texel was full

of delights : it was not hard to wait : but I am free to admit that I worried my companions daily, until at last M. Burdet fixed a date on which the attempt should be made.

This first trial, on June 8th, was a failure. We chose one of the nests, reputed to be the earliest occupied, where the hen was certainly sitting hard. For we flushed her when we were within a few yards of her home. The site was easily cleared : I was put in and well concealed, and warned that if she did not return I must not stay more than an hour and a half. She hovered over me : several times I saw her shadow, and once herself ; and her cry proved that she was constantly in the neighbourhood. But there was nothing more. And next day when we were early on the spot it was the same—save that overnight an ant's nest had discovered the tent and decided to explore its ground-sheet, and when I arrived to include me in their investigations. It was a warm day and I stayed longer, nearly three hours in all, and have seldom been so uncomfortable. Two hours on the day following were equally fruitless. The bird must have returned as soon as I left ; for each time she was sitting hard when we approached ; but when I was there, she was not.

On June 11th, the last day of our spell in Texel, it was damp and threatened rain. Obviously in such weather I could not risk the safety of the eggs, and with reluctance took up the tent. In one of the other nests, the only one that contained five eggs, a chick had appeared that morning ; and M. Burdet comforted me with the promise that on our return I should try this one, where perhaps the parents would be less shy. The baby was a delicious little person, very tiny and very white, but truculent of gesture and entirely without fear.

It was on the 21st that we returned—a day to be marked

in my annals with a white stone. All five babies had hatched, but it requires a photograph to demonstrate the differences between them. The eggs must evidently have been laid at intervals of two days, and had been incubated from the first. This appears to be the rule with the true Hawks, with Harriers, Sparrow-hawks, Buzzards and Eagles, as it is with certain at least of the Owls, the Short-eared, the Long-eared, the Tawny and perhaps the Barn. It is not so with the Little Owl, at least in the only cases that I have tested, nor with the Falcons. With my Harriers the gap between the ten-days-old eldest and his youngest brother was astonishing: one could hardly have a clearer proof of the phenomenal growth of young birds, or a plainer warning of the risk that the Benjamin of the family would run in time of dearth.

The start was a little delayed owing to a visit to a Long-eared Owl, a bird so tame that M. Burdet could lift her on his hand from off her young; and it was not till 9.45 that my vigil began. After three days of fruitless patience I had learnt to wait, and did not expect a visitor during the first hour. It was pleasant to have the youngsters to wile away the time. Eggs have little fascination when once the charm of the first view is over: a family so diverse as these was a very welcome alternative. At first they were very quiet, shuffling about occasionally, but on the whole sleepy and well-fed. But as the hour drew to its close they became restless. The eldest stretched himself, tried to flap his down-clad wings, and patrolled round the nest, moving on the whole length of the tarsus, though able for a moment to raise himself on to the soles of his feet. The second made an effort to emulate him without much success. The juniors spent their strength in getting out of the way. Not long after the old bird's cry set them all quivering:

she was not far off, and I screwed my eyes to the slits in hopes of a glimpse. She passed over, and for a time we were all disappointed. Then a thrill shook the brood into excitement: her wings were beating just overhead, and in a breathless moment of wonder and tension the great bird dropped before me. So huge she looked as she stood with pinions outspread, a statuette in golden-bronze inlaid with silver where the bars of her tail and the white of the coverts took the sunshine. I dare not risk an immediate exposure; and in a moment she was gone. An unforgettable picture was left on my memory, but nothing on my plate.

When once a bird has had the courage to make a first descent, if the photographer has done nothing to alarm her, she will return. I comforted myself with this faith, which has never yet been proved false. But in the next half-hour it was severely tried. She had come at 11.5: it was at 11.35 that she came again. This time she folded her wings and stood majestic over her brood. I suppose I ought to have let her feed them, have given her the statutory five minutes; but after one disappointment I could not manage a long delay. The shutter snapped, and I had taken Montagu's Harrier at last. I waited half an hour more, and at noon had the joy of seeing the blue cock sail over with a twig in his beak, and five minutes later his mate follow with three twigs. It is well known that Harriers add material to the nest during incubation, and the best bird picture that has ever been taken is probably M. Burdet's study of the male bringing down a stalk to it. But why the pair chose this occasion to perform the first part of the ritual I cannot imagine. Having got my exposure I took it as an appeal for a truce, packed up my camera, and left them to their domestic duties.

It was a passable picture: even in Texel I could not but

develop it that evening and make sure of my good fortune. But one was not enough. I must get the vision of those uplifted wings on to a negative, or go away with a task unachieved. So next morning I was back again. The youngsters seemed none the worse: even the baby was looking happy; but it was more than two hours before I had my chance. Then, heralded by a tension of her brood, she dropped before me, and on the instant of her pause while the great vans filled my view she was taken. The sunlight was too strong for a perfect result; but to have got her so was to fulfil my highest hopes. She had come at 11.25. I had the morning free, and should not be fetched till one. She had come and would return. At 11.45 she did. I waited: she did not; and the exposure registered a blur of tail and drooping claws. And then my highest hopes were surpassed.

It is seldom that the cock bird visits the nest. Normally he brings the prey, hovers over his home, is joined in the air by his mate and hands over the catch to her. Years ago in Norfolk I had seen the whole ceremony, and wondered at the deft perfection of its performance. M. Burdet, who has filmed and photographed them for many years, has only twice seen the male at the nest. So it had hardly crossed my mind as a possibility. Certainly that morning at 12.15, when the excitement in the nursery proclaimed that food was near, I had no suspicion of the gift that was to be mine. Wings beat the air above me: I caught my breath in the suspense; and he came. A gleam of vivid steel, bright as a knife-blade, and with a young rat in his talons, the blue Hawk alighted between me and his family. He was nervous: his wings were kept half-closed ready for a spring; his head swung round to look at the tent: I dare not risk delay and a repetition of my previous failure.

It was then or never. His departure almost, but not quite, coincided with the exposure. Fortunately for one of his charges he left the rat behind; and the eldest made it his own, regardless of the expostulations of his brethren. That half an hour afterwards I had a second picture of the hen with wings displayed was relatively unimportant. After five years of desire, and five days of waiting, I had been rewarded beyond my wildest dreams. Even Heinrich, when I found him at the entrance to the sanctuary, realised that it was a red-letter day. The ash-grey chicken-thief is not likely to lose his place as the noblest trophy of my birding.

After so august a lord of the air, mere Kestrels may seem almost trivial. Yet for one who has not Captain Knight's skill in the tree-tops and who had whetted his appetite by gazing from below at two eyries in Lakeland cliffs, the little falcon had a big place. There was indeed hardly anything that had been more definitely in my mind when my visit was being planned. The birds of prey have always a fascination of their own, and no one who loves the countryside can help feeling a particular affection for the Windhover. Long ago, when my wife and I were spending a day or two at Tuddenham at the close of a May term, and were searching for stray specimens of *Lithostege griseata*, we had had our lunch interrupted by a cock bird struggling towards us with a large victim in his claws. He decided that the burden was too heavy, and perched on a tree-root out of sight. I crept towards him, and found the headless corpse of a Starling in the dull brown plumage of immaturity, a bird which the hawks are not supposed to favour.

Kestrels are catholic in their choice of nesting sites. I have seen eggs in a church-tower, in an old Wood-pigeon's nest, in cliffs, and once in Norfolk under a heap of bundles



MONTAGU'S HARRIER, *Hen alighting at nest*



MONTAGU'S HARRIER, *Male at nest*



KESTREL AND NEST

of mown reeds. On the Muy there is usually a clutch or two on the sand, hidden away in the heart of a thicket of buckthorn. This year there were three in different parts of the preserve. One was already hatched when we arrived, and had suffered the attentions of a Dutch photographer, who tried, but I think in vain, to picture it with a camouflaged camera and an immense length of wire. We watched him lying up disconsolate on the ride that crosses the scrub. On June 5th he gave it up; we set up a tent, and I prepared for a vigil. The young were about a week old, four healthy-looking babies much of a size and still in white down. They had evidently had their breakfast, and were drowsy and dull; and though the old bird came down to a bush some twenty yards away, she was not in any hurry to face the camera. After an hour or so it began to drizzle, and I decided to give it up. Her family were much too nice to be allowed to catch cold.

The other nest that I visited was near the Harriers' colony. The eggs did not hatch till June 11th, and when I saw them that morning one of the infants was not yet dry, and the hollow was littered with scraps of eggshell. We gave them ten days to get strong enough for the ordeal; and on the 21st, after my success with the Kiekendief, I spent the afternoon in their company. Within half an hour the hen alighted a yard from the nest with a mouse in her claws. She stopped for a moment to look at the tent, paid no attention to the exposure, hopped to her brood, tore up her prey, distributed it among them, and departed, leaving me the proud possessor of four photographs of the proceedings. Ten minutes later there was a rush of wings and a quivering scream from behind the tent. I looked out through a slit in its right side and saw the cock perched on a tall shoot of thorn, with a half-fledged bird—a Lark or

Pipit—in his claws, and uttering his cry—kri ki ki ki ki. He stopped calling, seized his prey in his beak, held it up, and his mate swooped down, checked, grasped it with her foot as it hung, and flew off with it, calling shrilly. In a moment or two, at 3.15, she appeared at the nest, carrying the bird, stood on it, pulled it to pieces and gave each of her four babies their portion. Then there was a considerable interval, neither bird putting in an appearance until 4.5, when the hen brought part of a young rabbit: probably she had herself consumed the harder pieces. At 4.20 the cock came to some spot behind the tent and called: the hen joined him: there was a clamour of cries, and a minute later she descended with a mouse. At 4.25 the cock again flew past with the familiar summons, and at 4.27 a second mouse was shared out by his mate. At 4.45 a third mouse was brought in: it was headless—I think this was usual—and the hen tore off pieces, working from the neck backwards. This time, when only the hindquarters were left, one of the nestlings seized the whole joint and shuffled with it to the back of his brothers. Such bad manners were not allowed: the hen bird hopped into the hollow, rescued the food, pulled it into mouthfuls and gave each baby a share. The fact is of some interest, as on the next day, the chicks being then eleven days old, small prey was no longer dismembered, but was delivered headless but otherwise entire to a single youngster. Evidently they had then just reached the stage at which they could digest unprepared food, gulped down whole instead of given in mouthfuls.

The chief point of interest for the student of behaviour that I observed in my hours with young hawks is a matter that calls for delicacy in its description. It is well known that most birds are scrupulously careful about the sanitation

of their nesting-places. We are all familiar with the pictures of hen thrushes or warblers gazing solicitously, and as we would believe affectionately, at their families. What a symbol of devoted motherhood, although the devotion is eminently practical. The parent is, in fact, waiting for the waste products of digestion. Thrushes and Chats swallow the white ball of excrement; most other small birds, and certainly such species as the Warblers, the Flycatchers and the Pipits, carry it away in the beak and deposit it at a distance from the nest. Although very soft the *fæces* are enclosed in a membranous covering which serves as a wrapper. In the Hawks the excrement is very fluid, and from their infancy the nestlings discharge it outside their home. My young Buzzard had drenched some sprays of polypody that hung just below the cavity of the nest. The Harriers and the Kestrels backed to the edge of the hollow, elevated their sterns, and shot a spirt of white liquid on to the herbage outside. It was a characteristic movement which I soon recognised at its inception. A youngster would detach himself from the group—they usually sat huddled together, heads in the centre—would waddle awkwardly backwards, perform his duties, and plunge again into the bosom of his family. The youngest Harrier, a mite of two days, was as punctilious as his elders, and as successful. Had I been permitted to watch the first-born from the egg, it would have been possible to prove whether the action was instinctive or, if not, how the habit was taught. There is no doubt in my own mind that it was not due to education, that the Hawks behave in this way as naturally as they peck at food. But the question raises points as regards inherited routine which are not easily answered. Pecking is certainly instinctive—that is, the bird does it without lessons, though

it has to learn by trial and error to discriminate between what is edible and what is not. So is flying: a nestful of House Martins, once they are full-fledged, will throw themselves into the air when you get up to their nest, and will fly away without practice and without apparent difficulty. These are functions common to the whole tribe. In a specialised habit one wants to know the stages by which it has been developed, and the mechanism by which it is acquired and transmitted. If we could answer such questions we should be better able to explain why the young Cuckoo deserted by its parents follows them to the south, and how it steers the course of its migration: we might even be able to throw some light on the disputed matter of use-inheritance. Behind them lurks a problem which we are still very far from being able to clear up. It is not the least part of the charm of birding that even the amateur soon finds himself confronted with questions on which the experts cannot pronounce a clear verdict. If he is patient and honest in his watching he may always hope that some slight hint in the behaviour of his bird friends will start a train of thought that may lead to the possibility of an answer. At least he gains an insight into the mystery of life, a humility and a reverence which are as precious to the soul as the hours spent in the open air can be to the body. Thank God for His birds.

INDEX

- ABERYSTWYTH, 2
 Anglesey, 65 ff.
 Arctic Skua, 61
 Arctic Tern, 119, 139-44; laying egg, 142
 Aviemore, 115
 Avocet, 157

 Bar-tailed Godwit, 147
 Bass Rock, 96 ff.
 Black Guillemot in Ireland, 55; in I. of Man, 75; in Scotland, 129-30
 Black-headed Gull, 53
 Black-necked Grebe and nest, 69
 Black Tern and young, 171-3
 Black-throated Diver, 123-4
 Buzzard, 7-11, 15

 Calf of Man, 84 ff.
 Carrion Crow, 17
 Chaffinch, 86
 Chough, 41, 70-1
 Coal Tit, 17
 Cockburnspath, 91-5
 Common Gull, 52, 128-9
 Common Sandpiper, 114-15
 Common Tern, 43, 135-7, 173-5
 Coot, 86
 Cormorant, 43, 65; nesting in trees, 169
 Corn Bunting, 118
 Crosshaven, 40 ff.
 Cuckoo, habits of young, 153-65, 169
 Curlew, 23, 67

 Denbigh moors, 22-3, 67
 Dipper, 17
 Douglas, 76 ff.
 Dunlin, 145

 Eider Duck, 95-6, 124-5

 Fulmar Petrel, 92-5, 127

 Gannet, 43, 57, 97-9
 Glandore, 44 ff.
 Goldcrest, 108

 Golden Eagle, 130-3
 Golden Oriole, 169
 Golden Plover, 67, 88-9, 119
 Goosander, 124
 Great Black-backed Gull, 44, 68, 128
 Great Crested Grebe, 145
 Green Woodpecker, 153
 Greenshank, 47, 119-20
 Grey Plover, 147
 Grey Wagtail, 17, 41, 86
 Grouse, 3, 23, 89-90
 Guillemot, 30-8, 50, 127

 Handa, 125 ff.
 Heron, 47
 Herring Gull, 25, 74
 Holkham, 170
 Holyhead, 65 ff.
 Hooded Crow, 41, 73-4
 House Martin, 47

 Inverness, 115

 Jackdaw, 17

 Kentish Plover, 169
 Kestrel, 5; and young, 180-3
 Kittiwake, 30, 53, 63, 97-9, 126
 Knot swimming, ix, 147

 Lammermuirs, 88 ff.
 Land Rail, 85
 Lapwing, 23
 Lesser Black-backed Gull, 25, 28
 Little Grebe, 86
 Little Owl, 156
 Little Tern, 104-12
 Liverpool, 1, 2

 Magpie, 17
 Mallard, 119
 Manx Shearwater, 43, 56
 Marsh Tit, 17
 Merlin, 118
 Merstham, 108
 Montagu's Harrier and young, 175-81
 Moorhen, 2

- Nuthatch, 153
 Oystercatcher, 42, 67, 86, 147
 Peel, 87
 Peregrine Falcon in Ireland, 41; in Anglesey, 66-7; in I. of Man, 76-81; in Scotland, 127-8
 Pied Flycatcher, 17, 113
 Pied Wagtail, 85; mated with White, 118
 Puffin, 25-7, 33, 55, 96, 126
 Puffin Island, 25 ff.
 Purple Sandpiper, 47
 Raven in Wales, 2; in Westmorland, 5-7, 11-17; in Anglesey, 29, 66-8; in Ireland, 47; in I. of Man, 82
 Ravensglass, 107
 Razorbill, 25, 28, 34-6, 48, 127
 Red-breasted Merganser, 119, 125
 Red-legged Partridge, 108
 Redpoll, 118
 Redshank, 42, 109-12
 Redstart, 17, 153
 Red-throated Diver, 120-3
 Reed Bunting, 85, 118
 Ring Ousel, 17, 118
 Ringed Plover, 109-11, 137-9
 Rock Dove, 41, 47, 118
 Rock Pipit, 41, 86
 Rook, 41
 Ruff, 169
 Sanderling, 147
 Scoter, 1, 148-9
 Scourie, 115 ff.
 Sedge Warbler, 85
 Shag, 41, 48-50, 127
 Shelduck, 86, 169-70
 Shoveller, 169
 Snipe, 90
 Spanish Head, 83
 Spotted Flycatcher, 85
 Starling, 91
 Stock Dove, 17
 Stone Curlew, 108, 169
 Stonechat, 77
 Stormy Petrel, 57
 Suffolk coast, 103 ff.
 Tawny Owl, 2
 Teal, 150
 Texel, 169 ff.
 Tree Creeper, 14
 Tree Pipit, 17
 Turtle Dove, 108
 Twite, 118
 Water Rail, 86
 Waxham, 106-7
 Wheatear, 17
 Whimbrel, 47
 Whinchat, 90-1
 White Stork, 169
 White Wagtail, 118
 Whitethroat, 85
 Willow Wren, 86, 118
 Wren, 86
 Yellow Hammer, 118
 Yellow Wagtail, 110

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